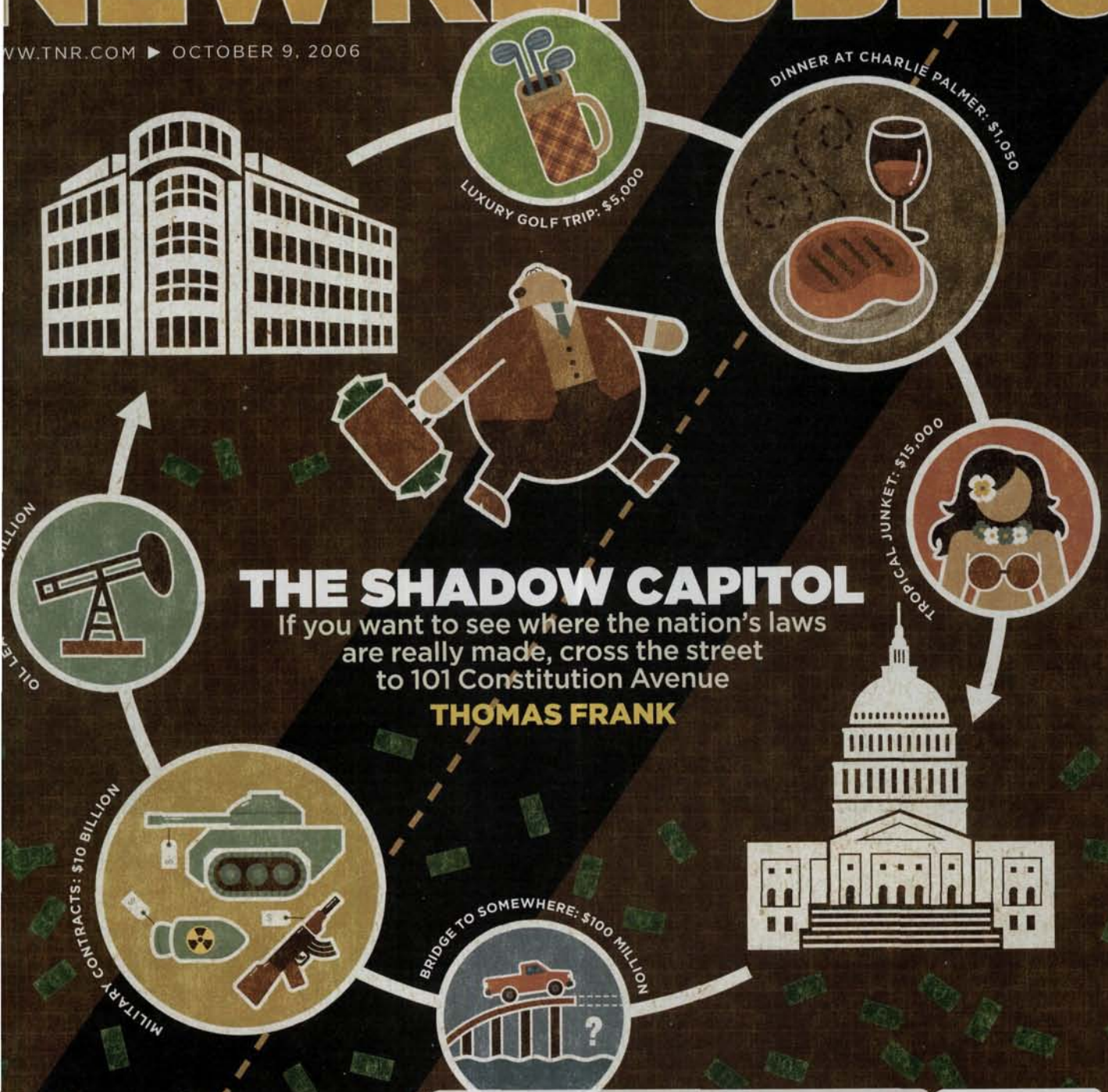
DAVID NIRENBERG: The Pope's True Insult | STEVEN PINKER on George Lakoff

THE NEW REPUBLIC

WWW.TNR.COM ▶ OCTOBER 9, 2006


LUXURY GOLF TRIP: $5,000
DINNER AT CHARLIE PALMER: $1,050
TROPICAL JUNKET: $15,000
BRIDGE TO SOMEWHERE: $100 MILLION
MILITARY CONTRACTS: $10 BILLION
OIL LEASES: $1 BILLION

THE SHADOW CAPITOL

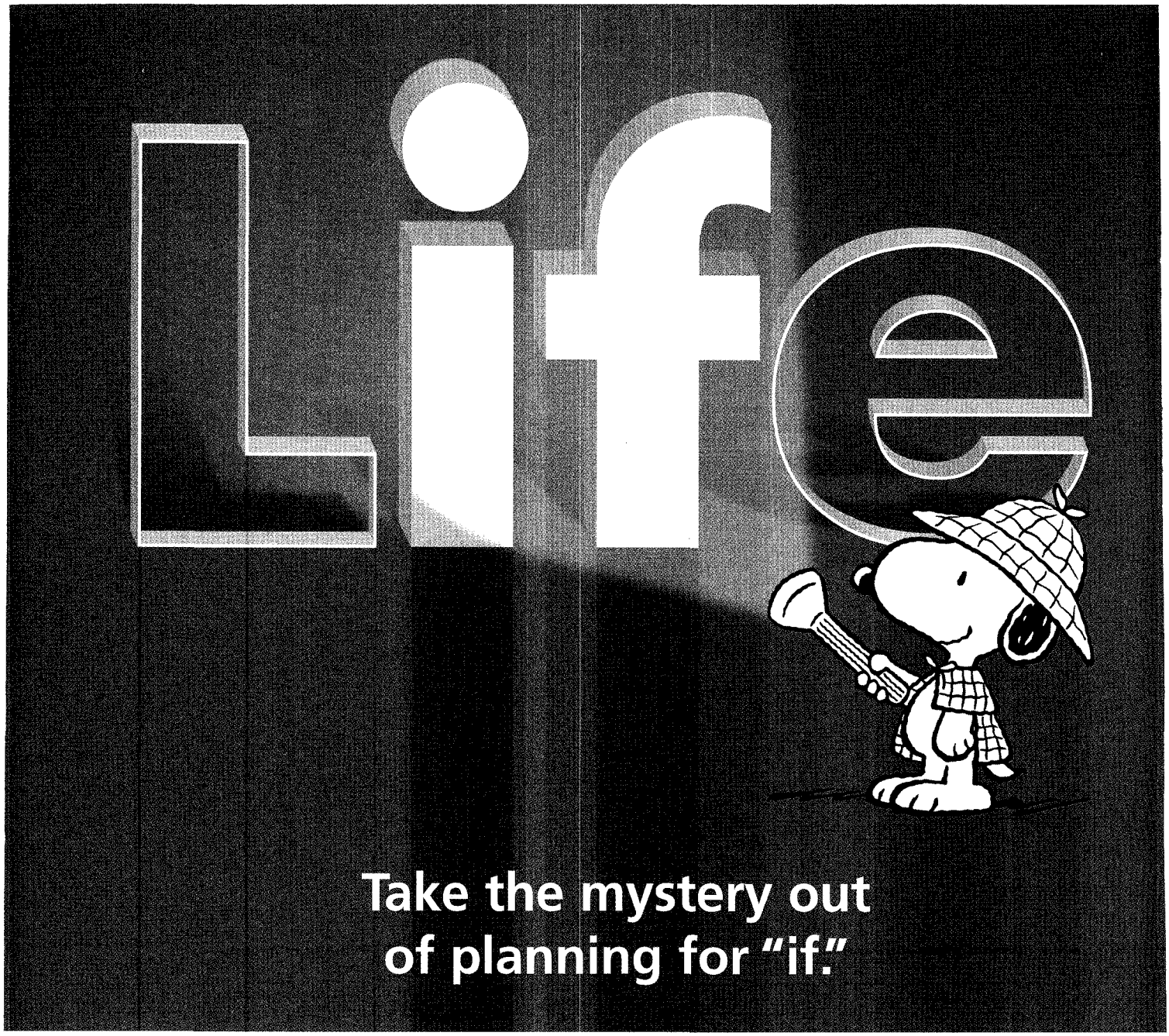
If you want to see where the nation's laws are really made, cross the street to 101 Constitution Avenue

THOMAS FRANK

#BXNRTKG **********AUTO** 5-DIGIT 94301
#9070100000554422# 0634 13MAR07
RON K UNZ
371
555 BRYANT ST
PALO ALTO CA 94301-1704 P0007

$3.95US $4.95CAN 41
0 71486 01742 4

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Let's shed some light on life insurance.

For every "if" in life, there's a solution. Like protecting your family with life insurance. Choosing the right coverage doesn't have to be as costly, complicated or mysterious as you may think. MetLife is the largest provider of life insurance in the U.S. Our representatives help sort through your choices to build on what you already have and adjust for your growing needs. Starting with your existing coverage, we'll collaborate with you to fill in the gaps and help you create your personal safety net. Demystifying life insurance is as simple as calling on our expertise. Together we can make a plan for "if."

Call 1-888-MetLife or visit metlife.com.

Guarantees for the if in life.

MetLife®

have you met life today?®

Guarantees apply to certain insurance (not securities and investment and advisory) products and are subject to product terms, conditions, exclusions and limitations and the insurer's claims-paying ability and financial strength. Metropolitan Life Insurance Company, New York, NY 10166. MetLife Investors USA Insurance Company, Irvine, CA 92614. MetLife and its affiliates are the largest life insurance organization in the U.S. based on the in-force life insurance. 2005 AM Best. ©2006 MetLife, Inc. PEANUTS © UFS, Inc. L0608AW5A(exp1208) ENT-LD

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
MARTIN PERETZ

EDITOR Franklin Foer
LITERARY EDITOR Leon Wieseltier
EXECUTIVE EDITOR J. Peter Scoblic
MANAGING EDITOR Katherine Marsh
DEPUTY EDITOR Richard Just
MANAGING EDITOR/ONLINE
Adam B. Kushner
EDITOR-AT-LARGE Peter Beinart
SENIOR EDITORS
Jonathan Chait, Jonathan Cohn, Michelle Cottle, Michael Crowley, Ruth Franklin, John B. Judis, Lawrence F. Kaplan, Ryan Lizza, Christopher Orr, Noam Scheiber, Lee Siegel, Andrew Sullivan, James Wood, Jason Zengerle
LEGAL AFFAIRS Jeffrey Rosen
ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR
Britt Peterson
TNR ONLINE
Christiane Culhane, Culture Editor
FILMS Stanley Kauffmann
THEATER Robert Brustein
ART Jed Perl
ARCHITECTURE Sarah Williams Goldhagen
MUSIC David Hajdu
DANCE Jennifer Homans
POETRY EDITOR Glyn Maxwell
SPECIAL CORRESPONDENTS
Thomas B. Edsall, Joshua Kurlantzick
CONTRIBUTING EDITORS
David A. Bell, Paul Berman, Gregg Easterbrook, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Nathan Glazer, Anthony Grafton, David Grann, David Greenberg, Yossi Klein Halevi, Robert Kagan, Michael Kinsley, Charles Krauthammer, Jeremy McCarter, John McWhorter, Sherwin B. Nuland, Michael B. Oren, David Rieff, Maggie Scarf, Ronald Steel, Cass R. Sunstein, Alan Taylor, E.V. Thaw, Helen Vendler, Michael Walzer, Sean Wilentz, Alan Wolfe, Robert Wright
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS
Jack Coughlin, David Cowles, Vint Lawrence, David Schorr
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Spencer Ackerman
ART/DESIGN DIRECTION
Joe Heroun, Christine Car/H2C Media
EDITORIAL-CORPORATE COORDINATOR
Linda Gerth
PRODUCTION AND I.T. DIRECTOR
Bruce Steinke
PRODUCTION MANAGER
Henry Riggs
ASSISTANT EDITORS
Kara Baskin, Alexander M. Belenky, Eve Fairbanks, Marisa Katz, Keelin McDonell
ASSISTANT LITERARY EDITOR
Chloë Schama
ASSISTANT POETRY EDITOR Melanie Rehak
REPORTER-RESEARCHERS
Isaac Chotiner, Bradford Plumer, Elspeth Reeve
INTERN
Conor Clarke
INTERN, TNR ONLINE
Jared Westheim

GENERAL MANAGER Allen Chin
CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Lori Fleishman Dorr
ONLINE MARKETING MANAGER Emilie Harkin

ADVERTISING SALES & MARKETING
ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER Richard Parker
DIRECTOR OF ADVERTISING, WEST
Joan Stapleton Tooley
ACCOUNT DIRECTOR Julie Sturmak Kettell
PUBLISHING REPRESENTATIVE
Perry Janoski, Allston-Cherry, Ltd.
MARKETING MANAGER Alexandra Scott

TNR/ON SYMPOSIA ON PUBLIC POLICY
Joan Daly

FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION
ACCOUNTING MANAGER Jessie Ahn
BUSINESS ASSISTANT Jillian Wheat

BOARD OF DIRECTORS
LEONARD ASPER
LAURENCE GRAFSTEIN
ROGER HERTOG, Chairman
MARTIN PERETZ
MICHAEL STEINHARDT

THE NEW REPUBLIC
Updated daily. On the Web at www.tnr.com.

THE NEW REPUBLIC
A JOURNAL OF POLITICS AND THE ARTS

OCTOBER 9, 2006 WASHINGTON, D.C. ISSUE 4,786 VOLUME 235

COVER STORY

Thomas Frank **14** **The Shadow Capitol** Visitors to Washington who want to see democracy in action waste their time in the Capitol viewing galleries. They would learn more if they crossed the street and toured the gleaming temple of influence-peddling that is 101 Constitution Avenue.

POLITICS & THE WORLD

4 **CORRESPONDENCE** The trials of Nancy Cunningham, &c.

Peter Beinart **6** **TRB** | **Free For All** Our freedom v. their freedom.

The Editors **7** **Absurdistan** Our worst terrorism nightmare.

Boris Fishman **8** **Politborough** Is the Kremlin manipulating a state assembly race in Brooklyn?

Spencer Ackerman **10** **War-niks** Why can't the right let go of Vietnam?

Sanford Levinson **12** **Poison Pen** The case against the veto.

T. A. Frank **13** **Good Ole Goy** Days of atonement for George Allen.

Leon Wieseltier **34** **WASHINGTON DIARIST** | **Alms and The Man**

BOOKS & THE ARTS

Stanley Kauffmann **20** **FILMS** | **Liberalizers** *Wrestling With Angels: Playwright Tony Kushner* looks thoughtfully at a sympathetic figure; *Al Franken: God Spoke*, like its subject, lacks subtlety.

David Nirenberg **21** **Paleologus and Us** Since he made Manuel II Paleologus into almost a household name, Pope Benedict XVI has been denounced throughout the Muslim world. But his remarks may be even more troubling than they appear.

Steven Pinker **24** **Block That Metaphor!** *Whose Freedom?: The Battle Over America's Most Important Idea* by George Lakoff

G.W. Bowersock **29** **The Pen and the Baton** *Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera* by Philip Gossett

Rowan Ricardo Phillips **32** **POEM** | *Tonight*

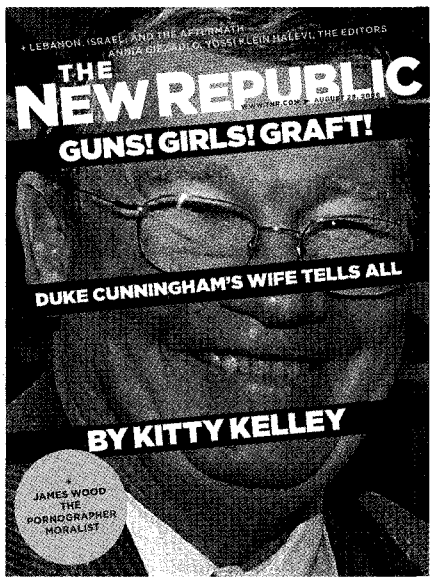
COVER ILLUSTRATION BY *Headcase Design*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

CORRESPONDENCE

DUKE IT OUT

I AM WRITING IN MY CAPACITY AS counsel for Randall "Duke" Cunningham in regard to Kitty Kelley's article ("Ace in the Hole," August 28). I was unavailable due to professional commitments when I was contacted by Ms. Kelley; it is disturbing that your magazine would print this story before providing Cunningham or his counsel an adequate opportunity to speak with your publication regarding the particulars of her story. As a consequence, your story omitted certain key facts that I suspect your readers would have wanted to know. For example, Kelley's article states that Cunningham left thousands of dollars in cash in a duffel bag for his wife before his sentencing. The article fails to note, however, that Cunningham disclosed in his pre-sentence investigation that he possessed this cash. I presume you understand that the pre-sentence investigation report was provided to the U.S. District Court that sentenced Cunningham and to the office of the U. S. attorney that prosecuted him. Thus, the intimation in your article that Cunningham was attempting to hide funds from the government is erroneous. Cunningham left cash with his wife that he had previously disclosed to the government because he was to be incarcerated the next day and could not physically carry thousands of dollars into the federal correctional system. There was nothing sinister or unusual about Cunningham leaving cash, clothes, and other personal effects with his wife prior to his entering the penal system. Your story also reports that Nancy Cunningham felt "abandoned by Duke Cunningham's attorneys at O'Melveny & Myers for not negotiating her immunity." Kelley failed to explain, however, that our firm did not represent Nancy Cunningham at the time we were negotiating her husband's plea agreement. During our negotiations with the office of the U.S. attorney, our ethical obligations were to represent only Duke Cunningham's interests. We had no authority or ability to secure immunity for Nancy Cunningham. She had counsel of her own. Yet



your story fails to alert your readers to this key fact.

K. LEE BLALACK II
O'Melveny & Myers LLP
Washington, D.C.

KITTY KELLEY RESPONDS:

K. Lee Blalack had sufficient time to respond to my four telephone messages, my conversation with his secretary, and my follow-up e-mail with specific questions prior to publication. If Duke Cunningham was not "attempting to hide funds," as Blalack asserts, why did the former congressman berate his wife for turning over to her lawyer the contents of the duffel bag he dropped in her driveway the night before he was sentenced, which contained his dirty underwear and $32,000 in cash stashed in Ziploc bags? Nancy Cunningham continues to feel "abandoned" by her husband's attorneys for not negotiating immunity for her. Court records show that O'Melveny & Myers represented both Randall Cunningham *and* Nancy Cunningham from June to September 2005, and Nancy Cunningham understands many plea-bargain cases are made with U.S. attorneys in which consideration of immunity is given to the wife. Cunningham publicly stated to the judge on March 3, 2006, that his wife "knew nothing, absolutely nothing" about his crimes. He still continues to plead her innocence from prison. In a letter to Blalack dated August 4, 2006, a copy of which he sent to his wife (who shared it with me), Cunningham wrote: "You told me Forge [a lawyer in the U.S. attorney's office] would not probably go after Nancy. … If I seem desperate I am. I have proceeded with the belief that everything we were doing was in the best interest of Nancy & my family. Lee, I can't take much more. I can do my time but to watch Forge go after Wade/Wilkes and Tommy K. and destroy an innocent woman and children is beyond all pain." Public records show that O'Melveny & Myers was paid $570,000 by the "Friends of Duke Cunningham."

FINAL ANALYSIS

ELISABETH LASCH-QUINN LISTS ME as one of the persons who has followed a "new tradition of social criticism" inaugurated by Philip Rieff ("The Mind of the Moralist," August 28). I began my criticism of the medicalization of (mis)behaviors—and their de facto criminal control defined as psychiatric treatment—in the mid-'50s and introduced the term "myth of mental illness" in 1960 and the concept of "the therapeutic state" in 1963. Rieff's book, *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*, was published in 1966. Who was following whom?

THOMAS SZASZ, MD
Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry
State University of New York
Syracuse, New York

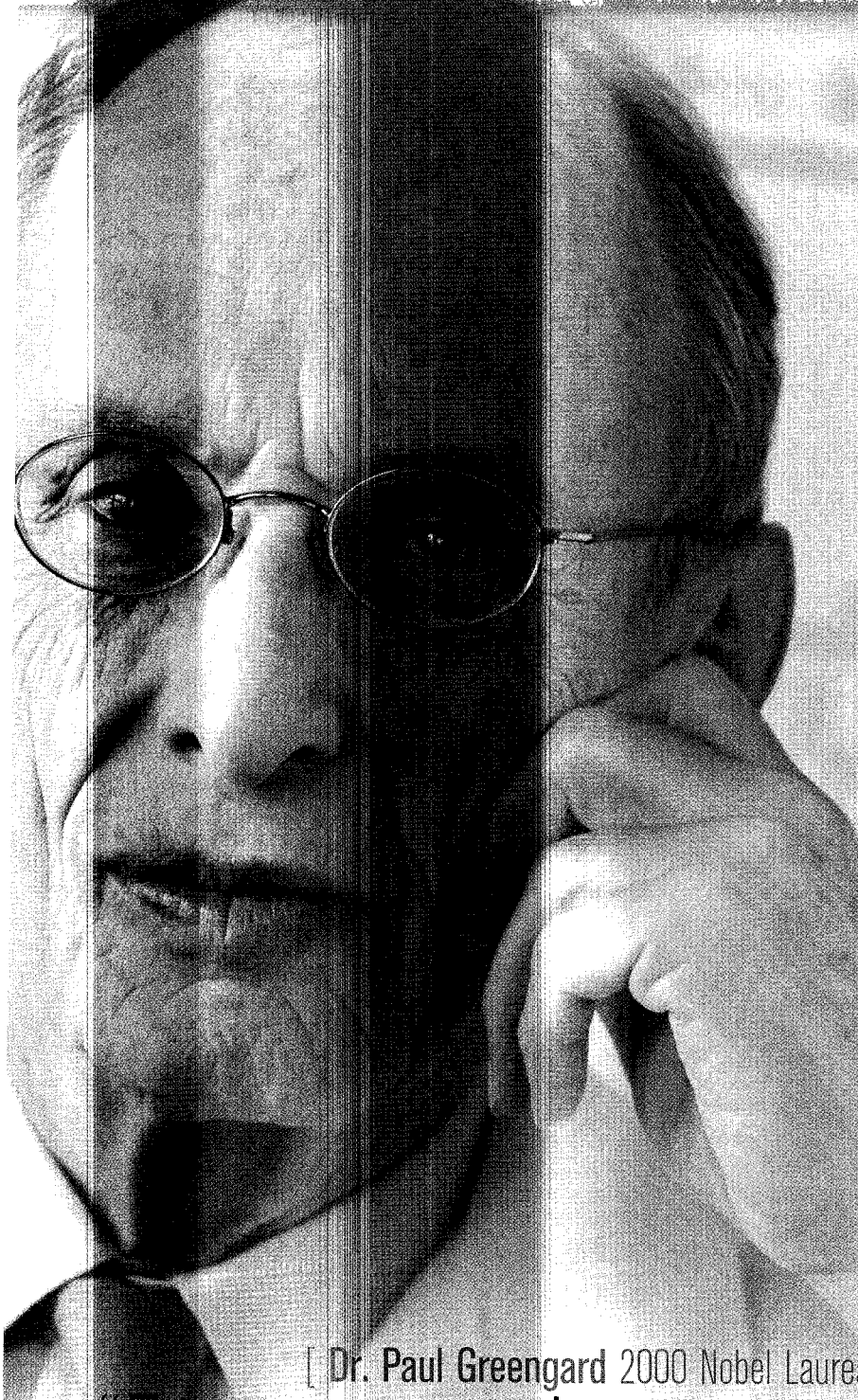
ELISABETH LASCH-QUINN RESPONDS:

The point I made in my essay was that Rieff's work, together with that

continued on page 33

THE NEW REPUBLIC (ISSN 0028-6583), Vol. 235, Number 15, Issue 4,736. October 9, 2006. (Printed in the United States on September 28, 2006.) Published weekly (except for combined issues dated March 20 & 27, June 5 & 12, July 10 & 17, August 14 & 21, September 11 & 18, and November 27 & December 4, 2006) at 1331 H Street, NW, Washington, D.C. 20005. Telephone (202) 508-4444. For advertising inquiries, please contact Jillian Wheat at (202) 508-4444. Yearly subscriptions, $79.97; foreign, $119.97 (U.S. funds); Canada, $99.97 (U.S. funds). Back issues, $8.00 domestic and $10.00 foreign/Canada (includes postage & handling). © 2006 by The New Republic, LLC. Periodicals postage paid at Washington, D.C., and additional mailing offices. Rights and permissions: fax (202) 628-9363. Indexed in Readers' Guide, Media Review Digest. For hard copy reprints, call (202) 508-4444. Microform, Canadian Periodical Index, and CD-ROM are available through ProQuest, 300 N. Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor, MI 48106. Telephone (800) 521-0600. Postmaster: Send changes of address to The New Republic, P.O. Box 420235, Palm Coast, FL 32142-0235. Member, Audit Bureau of Circulations. Unsolicited manuscripts can be returned only if accompanied by a self-addressed, stamped envelope (e-mail address: letters@tnr.com). For subscription inquiries or problems call (800) 827-1289 or visit our website at www.thenewrepublic.com.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



Some say depression is all in your head. Well, that's right. And wrong. It's right because depression is in the head, or more precisely, the brain. In fact, we've seen how it destroys the connections between brain cells.

Depression Is Real.

But saying depression is all in your head is also wrong. There's nothing imaginary about depression. It's a serious, medical condition that affects every aspect of a person's health. And untreated depression kills thousands of Americans a year — through suicide and by intensifying the symptoms of life threatening illnesses such as cancer and heart disease.

Hope Is Real, Too.

Today, research has identified many of the biological and environmental factors that contribute to depression. And medical science has developed effective treatments that can restore brain cell connections and lead to recovery. These treatments save lives. Depression is real. Fortunately, hope is real, too. To get the facts, please visit us at DepressionIsReal.org.

[Dr. Paul Greengard 2000 Nobel Laureate in Medicine]

"Every year, without any treatment at all, thousands stop suffering from depression. Because it kills them."

DepressionIsReal.org

American Psychiatric Foundation | Depression and Bipolar Support Alliance | League of United Latin American Citizens | National Alliance on Mental Illness
National Medical Association | National Mental Health Association | National Urban League

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Free For All

TRB

FROM WASHINGTON

LAST WEEK, THE UNITED NATIONS hosted a debate on the meaning of freedom. George W. Bush, in town for the opening of the General Assembly, made his usual pitch: The United States wants a world "where ordinary men and women are free to determine their own destiny."

Then Mahmoud Ahmadinejad took the podium and insisted that the United States wants no such thing. What the United States calls freedom, he insisted, is really "domination." Most of the world's problems, he argued, resulted "from the powerful, not being contented with their own rights, striving to devour the rights of others." He went on to talk endlessly about "justice" (using variations of the word 35 times)—one nation's right not to be dominated by others.

Then came Venezuela's Hugo Chávez, who also accused Bush of "domination." What the United States calls democracy, he insisted, is really "world dictatorship." "What a strange democracy," he exclaimed. "Aristotle might not recognize it."

Funny that he should mention Aristotle. In 1991, the sociologist Orlando Patterson published a book titled *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. Our understanding of freedom, he argued, comes from the Greeks. But, for many Greeks, freedom was intimately connected to slavery: Unless you dominated others, you weren't really free. (Southern slaveholders made a similar argument.) Patterson called this "sovereignal freedom," which he defined as "the power to act as one pleases, regardless of the wishes of others." And he contrasted it with "personal freedom"—the right to act as one pleases while respecting the rights of others to do the same.

Patterson is an eminent social scientist; Ahmadinejad and Chávez are populist thugs. But, without realizing it, they are playing on his distinction. Bush, they claim, defines freedom as America's right to impose its wishes on others, and, if people resist that imposition, they are therefore resisting freedom and democracy. "For some powers," Ahmadinejad declared, "claims of promotion of human rights and democracy can only last as long as they can be used as instruments of pressure and intimidation against other nations."

It would be nice to dismiss Ahmadinejad and Chávez as irrelevant, but their arguments have deep resonance. When the Council on Foreign Relations sponsored focus groups in Egypt, Morocco, and Indonesia, average citizens said that the United States "acts like a dictator," wants to "rule the world," and would "dominate the world by any means." A poll taken by the Pew Research Center in 2005 found that majorities in Indonesia, Pakistan, Nigeria, Turkey, Russia, Lebanon, Jordan, and Kuwait feared U.S. military action against their countries. As the poll put it, "People abroad are more likely to believe that the U.S.-led war on terror has been about controlling Mideast oil and dominating the world than they are to take at face value America's stated objectives of self-defense and global democratization."

Are these views the product of paranoia? Sure. But they are also the product of experience. For twenty-first-century Americans, Patterson's argument about the interconnection of freedom and oppression seems bizarre. (For nineteenth-century Americans, it would have seemed much less so.) For people whose countries were recently colonized, however, the argument is more intuitive. (Perhaps not coincidentally, Patterson himself hails from Jamaica.) French, Spanish, and British imperialists also spoke, in varying ways, about bringing Christianity, civilization, and, yes, freedom to the dark corners of the globe. And yet, to many of their subjects—who saw Europe's political, cultural, and economic progress in the age of empire—Western freedom seemed dependent on non-Western subjugation. Ahmadinejad and Chávez are hardly the first Middle Eastern and Latin American nationalists to suggest that what the West calls freedom is really a zero-sum game.

Sixty years ago, when the United States supplanted Great Britain as the greatest power on earth, American leaders argued that the age of imperialism was ending. Freedom meant self-determination for formerly subjugated peoples (including peoples subjugated by the USSR). And self-determination for the weak meant limits on the power of the strong. As Harry Truman said in a speech to the then-fledgling United Nations, "All of us must recognize—it doesn't matter how great our strength is—that we must deny ourselves the license to always do whatever we want."

This sentiment, to be sure, was sometimes honored in the breach. But it disposed the United States to a generally positive view of international institutions and international law. When the United States embraced civil rights at home, it rejected the argument for sovereignal freedom that white Southerners had been making since slavery. And, when the United States committed itself to international standards on human rights, it rejected the argument for sovereignal freedom implicit in the imperialism of the past.

Did that prevent Third World nationalists from calling the United States a neo-empire that purchased its growing freedom and prosperity at the expense of others? Not at all. But it furnished Americans with counterarguments. Human rights and self-determination, leaders like Truman insisted, were not merely masks for U.S. domination; they were principles that restrained the United States as well.

That argument never convinced everyone. But it convinced many more people than it does today. In the Bush era, as even a thoughtful neoconservative like Robert Kagan has acknowledged, "America, for the first time since World War II, is suffering a crisis of international legitimacy." And it is that crisis on which men like Ahmadinejad and Chávez feed.

Combating Ahmadinejad and Chávez does not require abandoning the language of freedom. To the contrary, it requires rescuing it—by recognizing that, unless freedom imposes restraints on the United States as well as on other nations, it will sound to many in the postcolonial world like domination.

If the interdependence of freedom and subjugation constitutes the West's cultural heritage, argued Patterson, the delinking of freedom from subjugation constitutes the West's great achievement. And, in a world where many have come to doubt and fear the United States, America must now achieve it again.

PETER BEINART

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

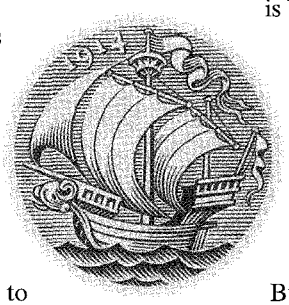
Absurdistan

WHEN IT COMES to nuclear secrets, we've learned the hard way that Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf's government leaks like a sieve. But, when it comes to the juicy bits from his new memoir, *In the Line of Fire*, Musharraf's lips are sealed. That was clear during his U.S. publicity tour this week, which even included a visit with "The Daily Show" 's Jon Stewart. (What's next, Ahmadinejad on Colbert?) When reporters asked Musharraf to elaborate on his improbable assertion that, after September 11, former Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage threatened to bomb Pakistan "back to the stone age," the gentle military dictator demurred. "I am honor-bound to Simon and Schuster not to comment on the book" before its publication date, he explained. If only Simon & Schuster had such power over A.Q. Kahn!

Also in Washington this week was Musharraf neighboring leader, Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan, conducting some p.r. work of his own—last month, *The New York Times* reported that Karzai faces a "crisis of confidence" in his leadership. Appearing on Sunday's "Meet the Press" (Musharraf isn't the only one with a publicist), Karzai launched his comeback tour by confessing that he had been "naïve"—a trait hardly suited for the land of Osama bin Laden—in his thinking about fighting Afghanistan's booming opium trade. Karzai also complained that Musharraf has turned a blind eye to border-area Islamic radicals, prompting Musharraf to later retort that Karzai may not be cut out for his job.

Watching these two men bicker and spin like a pair of junior congressmen, it's hard to feel sanguine about the future of the region. It's a war-on-terrorism nightmare: Where else can you find fully assembled nuclear weapons in the same neighborhood as well-organized Islamic militants—not to mention Osama bin Laden himself? And neither Musharraf nor Karzai seems to have a clue about how to improve the situation.

Musharraf, who has placated Pakistani jihadists, is the main culprit. Thanks, in part, to havens established along his border, the Taliban has recently launched its strongest counteroffensive in Afghanistan since its downfall in 2001. Foreign jihadists—again, streaming in from Pakistan—have introduced suicide-bombing to cities like Kabul, and they methodically burn down newly opened girls' schools. Sharia courts and public executions are, once again, springing up in the south. Karzai, meanwhile, has also displayed, in the *Times*' words, a "tendency to placate powerful armed factions rather than make tough decisions to improve governance."



Even Condoleezza Rice seems to appreciate the danger at hand, recently warning of Afghanistan that, "if you allow a failed state in that strategic a location, you're going to pay for it." But that's precisely what the Bush administration risks doing. NATO recently rebuffed its military chief's plea for another 2,500 troops to help fight the jihadists. Meanwhile, the top American commander in the country recently told *Newsweek* that more infrastructure investment is urgently needed—thanks, in part, to stingy spending by the United States and its allies. "Whatever it costs . . . we will pay," George Bush, referring to Afghanistan, vowed in his 2002 State of the Union speech. Perhaps he should go back and reread it.

But saving Afghanistan would be far easier if Musharraf ruled as deftly as he hawks his book. In it, he says his goal is to project a "soft image" of Pakistan—not one of "terrorism and extremism," but of "tourism, sports, and culture." Alas, stopping terrorism must come before cricket.

Musharraf may be better than most alternatives. But one wonders how long his game can go on. Earlier this month, he cut a deal with Islamic militants in his country's tribal region along the border with Afghanistan. Although many Afghan officials openly fret that the deal will give Al Qaeda and Taliban militants along the border more freedom to wreak havoc in their country, Musharraf insists that it won't.

And, for now, the White House is buying it. "When [Musharraf] looks me in the eye and says the tribal deal is intended to reject the Talibanization of the people, and that there won't be a Taliban and won't be Al Qaeda, I believe him," Bush said last week. But, of course, Bush has looked others in the eye (Vladimir Putin, Ahmed Chalabi) and been proved utterly wrong. We can only hope his instincts have sharpened and that our current fixation on the Persian Gulf doesn't distract us from preventing a South Asian disaster. After all, if bin Laden gets the Bomb, not even the Simon & Schuster publicity department will be able to stop him. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Glasnost grows in Brooklyn.

Politborough

BY BORIS FISHMAN

ONE SIGN THAT this year's race for the 46th Assembly District of New York was a little different than usual was the alleged involvement of the Kremlin. Ari Kagan, a 39-year-old journalist running for the state seat from Brooklyn, suggested that Moscow had a man in the race—that is, his opponent, Alec Brook-Krasny, who supports dialogue with the Kremlin. Although Moscow's backing of the 48-year-old former head of an umbrella group of Russian-Jewish organizations was never substantiated, the Kagan campaign's accusation galvanized the electorate. The 46th includes most of Brighton Beach, a two-square-mile Brooklyn enclave that, since the 1970s, has been home to Soviet and post-Soviet Jewish émigrés, a group you would expect to have special sensitivity to puppet candidates and fifth-column conspiracies. But there was more to come. In August, during a debate on RTVi, a Russian-language TV channel, Brook-Krasny produced a startling suggestion of his own—namely, that Kagan had ties to the former KGB, one of the less redeemable stigmas in a community that used to live in fear of the organization. All of a sudden, *Moscow on the Hudson* took on a whole new meaning.

This fall's election was unusual for another reason. For the first time, the contenders for the 46th, which also includes Coney Island, were both Russian-speakers, assuring the Brighton Beach Russians their highest-ever elected official. Demographics partly explain this. Between 1990 and 2000, the Russian community more than doubled in size; today, some 500,000 Russian-speakers live in the New York area. They are one of the city's highest-earning and most educated groups. According to Press Release Group, a market research firm that studies the Russian-American community, one out of every ten retail dollars spent in New York comes from Russian-speakers, including visitors from Russia. So the race between Kagan and Brook-Krasny was supposed to mark a maturing community's accession to political power. But it became so conflicted that it turned into a referendum on the community itself. Material success aside, was the community's grasp of the American civic ethos firm enough to warrant political clout? Or were many Russian-Americans still struggling to unlearn the instincts instilled by the privations of their Soviet lives?

ON A LATE July afternoon, both candidates were campaigning on the boardwalk that connects Brighton to Coney Island, the legendary oceanfront strip whose impending billion-dollar reconstruction will likely be overseen by the next state assemblyman and his colleagues in the local Democratic establishment. (This part of Brooklyn is so overwhelmingly Democratic that the general election in November tends to be a formality.) Nearby, Radio VSE, one of the community's two Russian-language radio stations, was hosting a boardwalk party. "I used to be quite far from politics," Aleksandr Shvarts, one of the station's owners, was saying from a makeshift stage. "But I registered just to be able to vote for Ari Kagan." He pointed to a tall man grinning broadly near the stage. "Ari isn't getting into politics to stuff his pockets full of money!" Shvarts was alluding to Brook-Krasny's backers. Kagan regularly derided them as wealthy Russian-American transplants to Manhattan and New Jersey who merely wanted to assure themselves access to business opportunities on Coney Island.

Soon, Brook-Krasny, a bearish man with a sleepy gaze, wandered over and sneered in Kagan's direction. For Brook-Krasny, who had been endorsed by the entire local Democratic establishment, Kagan was a political novice. "I've registered 4,000 of the 6,200 Russian Democrats in the district," he said. "Journalists only describe things, but politicians have to make them happen."

Brook-Krasny was placing himself in the latter category because he has run for neighborhood office twice before. Both bids were unsuccessful, but inexperience was only part of the reason. For years, it seemed as if the Brooklyn Democratic establishment was working to marginalize Russian candidates and voters—or so it appeared to a community with more experience in disenfranchisement than in the byways of American politics. In 2000, Brook-Krasny ran against a former teacher named Adele Cohen, but he was disqualified by a clubhouse judge appointed by the machine backing Cohen. The following year, Brook-Krasny lost a City Council Democratic primary to a school board member named Domenic Recchia, but another Russian speaker, a gynecologist and longtime Republican activist named Oleg Gutnik, managed to take 43 percent in the general election—"the highest total for a Republican in this area since Abraham Lincoln," Gutnik claimed with some pride. Startled by the community's voting power and indifference to party allegiance, Recchia managed to redistrict 5,000 Russian-speakers out of his jurisdiction.

This year, however, in an acknowledgment of the Russian community's growing influence, Recchia campaigned with Brook-Krasny. "The existing powers realized they have to let a Russian get elected so that the community doesn't start to resent them," Gutnik explained. "According to my sources, there was a meeting between the local Democratic politicians, and a decision was made to allow Russians to run and win."

Having been turned away for years, the Russian community is eager for office. But politics is an art of platforms and alliances, and the community doesn't really have either.

Boris Fishman is a freelance journalist in New York.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Brighton's Russian Jews are, for the most part, resolutely secular and remain distant from American Jewry, with its premium on ritual and religious identity. Mainstream American life elicits equally little curiosity—in fact, the unofficial Brighton Beach motto is "we don't go to America," that is, outside Brighton.

Community activists ascribe this to the lingering poison of the Soviet years—a set of insecurities that Russians never vanquished after arriving in the United States. "We brought the baggage of distrust—toward politics, toward government," Gene Borsh, who has organized voter-education programs for Russian-Americans, explained. "The result is this terrible apathy. What will my vote change?" He summed up the communal affliction as "*pofigism*," a one-of-a-kind Russian neologism that roughly translates as "I-don't-give-a-shit-ism." Borsh's colleague Marina Belotserkovsky described it as trepidation before the unknown that became expressed as disdain: "We stand apart—we don't get involved in the things these [native] idiots do." She said the feeling remains trenchant. "The community has no self-confidence. They're economically successful, well-educated, their children are in the best colleges; but that education is combined with an inner elitism, which makes it difficult to admit that there are things they simply don't know."

So, although Russian-Americans are one of the city's most prosperous groups—close to 70 percent have a bachelor's degree, and the average household earns $51,000—they are also perhaps its most politically confused. Many Brighton Beach residents originally registered as Republicans in the 1980s, sometimes out of gratitude toward Ronald Reagan and his hard line on communism. And Russian-Americans remain drawn to seemingly unwavering leaders like George W. Bush, who garnered 75 percent of the New York Russian vote in 2004. But many immigrated to the United States with elderly parents who required subsidized housing and health care—the métier of Democrats—and, by the late '90s, two-thirds of Russians in New York were registered as Democrats. (Even as Democrats, though, the Russians represent a uniquely conservative strain. During a debate on RTN, another Russian-language TV station, Brook-Krasny praised Senator Joseph McCarthy for discrediting communism in this country. Mark Golub, the American-born network president who happened to be hosting the program, subjected him to an embarrassing lecture.)

And the Russian-speaking community hasn't quite grasped some of the basics of campaigns, elected office, or the ethical boundaries officials (all citizens, in fact) must observe. In its quest for political literacy, Brighton Beach occasionally has been poorly served by the Russian-language press from which the community obtains the majority of its news, and, more importantly, translations of its adopted culture. A newspaper called *Novoye Russkoye Slovo*, which has existed for nearly a century and can fairly claim to be the community's most professional news source, didn't even mention in its reverential profiles of Brook-Krasny that he had a competitor. Brook-Krasny published advertorials masquerading as objective newspaper coverage in sympathetic publications. Kagan, for his part, appeared on a radio show that happened to be hosted by his p.r. consultant. This wasn't disclosed during the interview, during which the p.r. man lobbed flatteries and softballs at Kagan. With this kind of example, perhaps it's no surprise that *Novoye Russkoye Slovo* has received letters addressed to President Bush asking for help in obtaining a desired apartment.

The community's perplexity about the subtleties of American civic engagement was painfully evident back on the boardwalk, where Kagan was cornered by a scrum of elderly women in bright lipstick and nail polish.

"Ari, we came here all the way from Bensonhurst"—another Russian area in a neighboring district—"to tell you we are going to vote for you!" one of the women beamed.

"You can't," Kagan replied. "You can only vote for candidates in your own district. But you should still register."

The woman's face darkened. "What do you mean, we can't vote for you?!" she said, her voice rising. "This is democracy? I don't like this kind of democracy."

THE CANDIDATES HAD a unique opportunity to enlighten their compatriots about the mysteries of Jeffersonian democracy, but, frequently, they chose to mine communal anxieties instead, as in the conspiracy-mongering about Kremlin influence. Brook-Krasny implied that Kagan had belonged to the KGB because he had attended a Soviet military-political college that, according to the reminiscences of unnamed alumni, graduated only propaganda specialists and informers. Kagan denied the accusation, but newspapers supporting Brook-Krasny reprinted it as if it were fact.

Kagan, in turn, tarred Brook-Krasny as a proxy of the Kremlin. Since becoming president, Vladimir Putin has trumpeted the importance of converting Russian émigrés to ambassadors willing to lobby for Russian interests abroad. Last October, the Russian Foreign Ministry created a special department for émigré outreach, which has hosted receptions for and lavished awards on New York's Russian-American émigré leaders. (According to Konstantin Preobrazhensky, a retired KGB lieutenant colonel, the Russian foreign intelligence service has a parallel section.) Brook-Krasny has been receptive to Russian officials, ostensibly in the name of dialogue. But he appeared naïve to many in the community, when, after an attack on a Moscow synagogue earlier this year, he lobbied local community leaders to refrain from protesting in front of the Russian consulate in New York. (The Russian government had responded responsibly, he explained on the radio, adding, "To my mind, the better our relations with the Russian government, the better for Russian Jews [in Russia].")

Kagan feels that the Putin government is Soviet-style authoritarianism, only by another name, and he regards the Russian government's overtures with contempt. But Brook-Krasny and his backers see an opportunity. "Ari is calling for another cold war," Gregory Davidzon, a radio-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

station owner who backed Brook-Krasny, says. "I don't approve of Russian politics. But we must maintain contact and use all our resources to influence Russian policy."

Most in the local Russian-American community are with Kagan. "Why are we dealing with these people?" Alec Teytel, the president of a local business club, said during a Kagan fund-raising concert in August at the Millennium Theater, Brighton's main concert hall. "It's sad that these people are trying to get back in the graces of the Russian government." Irina Shmeleva, a freelance p.r. consultant who was standing nearby, shrugged: "We all remain Soviet citizens to one degree or another."

For the Russian-speaking community, this realization has been the sour note of an otherwise triumphant milestone: Russians aren't sure what they stand for, or even whom they stand with. In the meantime, Soviet habits persist. On September 12, nearly 5,600 voters in the 46th trooped to the polls. At the end of the day, Kagan clearly won a majority in Brighton. But Brook-Krasny was the eventual winner, by just over 100 votes. At Brighton's main voting station, a gym at the Shorefront YM-YWHA, a Russian-speaking woman was turned away because she wasn't properly registered. She turned to me and said with a wink: "You'll vote for the both of us, won't you, sonny?" ■

The other Vietnam syndrome.

War-niks

BY SPENCER ACKERMAN

AT THE BEGINNING of August, President Bush introduced a war-weary American public to an old conservative slander disguised as a new approach to the Iraq war. Shifting from his earlier rhetoric of optimism, he gave a series of election-timed speeches that were noticeably grim. Bush no longer emphasized the prospects of success; rather, he spoke of the danger of defeat. "Some politicians look at our efforts in Iraq and see a diversion from the war on terror," he said in a speech late last month. "If America were to pull out before Iraq can defend itself, the consequences would be absolutely predictable—and absolutely disastrous." The villains responsible for such a disaster, his surrogates pointed out, wouldn't be the insurgents in Baghdad or Falluja, but rather the Democrats in Washington, D.C., whom House Majority Leader John Boehner helpfully described as "more interested in protecting the terrorists than protecting the American people."

This latest political tactic has captured the conservative mood perfectly. In June 2005, *The Wall Street Journal* editorial page declared that "the terrorists are gaining ground is in Washington." Recently, this tune has become a chorus. In August, *The Weekly Standard* portrayed Connecticut Senate candidate Ned Lamont as the perfect embodiment of a fanatical antiwar sentiment sweeping the left. Its September 4 cover story, written by Harvard's William J. Stuntz (who is also a TNR contributor) asked "WILL WE CHOOSE TO WIN IN IRAQ?" as if a mere preference for victory could win a war. *National Review*, for its part, hosted a symposium on Iraq in its September 11 issue, in which not a single contributor recommended withdrawal. Instead, Robert D. Kaplan noted that the essential questions on Iraq were "homefront perceptions and a willingness to win"; Michael Rubin, a former Bush Pentagon analyst, seconded the notion, declaring, "The U.S. is losing in Iraq because American politicians and the general public have not decided they want or need to win." Somehow, conservatives have come to believe that the main impediment to America's battlefield fortunes exists not in Iraq, but in Cambridge, Berkeley, and the Upper West Side.

On the right, the latter half of 2006 is feeling a lot like 1968, the year that the American public finally lost faith in the Vietnam war. And, just as they did then, conservatives are turning causality on its head: People aren't growing disillusioned with the war because we're not winning it; we're not winning because people have grown disillusioned. After Vietnam, this analysis enabled the right to avoid the agonizing reappraisal of U.S. foreign policy that has been that war's legacy for liberalism and the Democratic Party.

But avoidance has its consequences as well. It's true enough that, for more than 30 years, the left has not infrequently suffered from "Vietnam syndrome"—the assumption that any military engagement will be a moral disaster and a potential quagmire. But, though it has been less examined, the lesson the right took from Vietnam—that the true danger to national security is not misguided wars, but overzealous opposition to misguided wars—is, if anything, more dangerous. Call it the Other Vietnam Syndrome.

DISILLUSIONMENT WITH A war usually follows a predictable pattern, particularly among elites: support or acquiescence for the enterprise; a tortured recognition of the war's poor fortunes; and, finally, denunciation. Norman Podhoretz, the neoconservative founding father, followed exactly the opposite course with Vietnam. In 1971, as editor of *Commentary*, Podhoretz wrote despondently about the war, "I now find myself ... unhappily moving to the side of those who would prefer ... an American defeat to a 'Vietnamization' of the war which calls for the indefinite and unlimited bombardment by American pilots in American planes of every country in that already devastated region." By 1982, however, Podhoretz had relocated the true fault for the Vietnam debacle—not among the war's architects, but among its critics. In *Why We Were in Vietnam*, he accused the antiwar movement of bearing "a certain measure of responsibility for the horrors that have overtaken the people of Vietnam." Over the interven-

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

ing decade, Podhoretz had somehow grown *illusioned* with the war and disillusioned only with its opponents.

Podhoretz's progress may seem intellectually confused. But it followed a trail blazed by others in the 1960s and '70s. Most Republicans and conservatives initially supported the war but criticized Lyndon Johnson's handling of it. The myth took hold that if only Johnson would allow his generals to prosecute the war with sufficient brutality—mining the Haiphong Harbor, destroying the Ho Chi Minh Trail in Laos and Cambodia—it could be won. Richard Nixon took office promising to end the war on a platform of "peace with honor," which nodded to opposition to the war across the political spectrum but, in truth, represented only the right-wing critique. (As *Washington Post* reporter Don Oberdorfer noted in 1972, "What President Nixon means by peace is what other people mean by victory.") Just as importantly, he identified the forces of peace with *dishonor*. In a crucial speech in 1969, Nixon married middle-American discontent with the protesters to a plea for patience as he expanded the war. "If a vocal minority," Nixon said, "however fervent its cause, prevails over reason and the will of the majority, this nation has no future as a free society." It was no longer necessary on the right to be pro-war—only anti-antiwar.

This would prove a potent template. When Nixon prosecuted an even more savage war with no appreciable change in its fortunes, an emboldened Congress, led by Democrats, voted to cut off funding in 1974. This had an unintended and profound consequence. Suddenly, the right, which had spent the previous five years and the entire Johnson administration recognizing that the war was bleak, if not totally futile, had a new scapegoat: the forces that had ended the war before giving their preferred strategy time to work. Those forces were twofold: first, the representatives and senators who had betrayed the troops in the field; second, the antiwar movement that had pressured them to do so.

The antiwar movement was indeed guilty of excesses, including appalling ones like essentially blood-libeling American servicemen as murderers for carrying out their orders. The justified bitterness of veterans, who were denied a rationale for their sacrifice, fueled the campaign to portray the opposition to the war as a betrayal. In 1984, Ronald Reagan took up its banner when he referred to Vietnam veterans as "heroes as surely as any who have ever fought in a noble cause." It was a deft rhetorical sleight of hand. Vietnam veterans deserved—and deserve to this day—to have their sacrifices honored by the country that sent them to war. But Vietnam was among the most *ignoble* causes the United States has ever engaged in.

The "stabbed in the back" myth has flourished on the right ever since. Indeed, what is so striking about conservative—and especially neoconservative—treatment of Vietnam is a near-complete disregard for the actual circumstances of the war. Occasionally, a book or scholarly article will come along challenging the conventional wisdom that the war was unwinnable or foolhardy, and it will receive some attention. (Lewis Sorley's *A Better War*, for instance—an impressive piece of scholarship that argues, unconvincingly, that General Creighton Abrams made the war winnable—was headlined by *The Weekly Standard* as "THE TRUTH ABOUT VIETNAM.") By and large, however, conservatives are content to shunt the actual Vietnam war to the background and elevate criticism of its critics. In his 1999 book, *How We Got Here*, David Frum argued that, just as the war showed signs of turning in America's favor, victory was snatched away by an anti-American fringe on college campuses and in the halls of Congress. Though the conservative movement reviles Henry Kissinger, Frum approvingly quoted his contention that "[t]he so-called peace movement had evolved from seeking an end of the war to treating America's frustrations in Indochina as symptoms of a moral degeneration that needed to be eradicated root and branch." Similarly, in a revealing column during the Sunni and Shia insurgencies of spring 2004, Charles Krauthammer rejected the Iraq-as-Vietnam comparison—except in one crucial sense: "Walter Cronkite, speaking for the establishment, declared the war lost. Once said to be lost, it was."

THERE ARE REASONS for such distortions. For one thing, the first generation of neoconservative intellectuals felt genuine terror over the radicalism of the antiwar movement. Indeed, it was this horror at the counterculture that had driven many of them to the right in the first place. "When we saw this attack [on the war] launched in the most extreme terms, we simply didn't understand what they were arguing about or what they were fighting about. The critique they launched of the United States was something we simply could not accept," Nathan Glazer recalled to filmmaker Joseph Dorman for the documentary *Arguing the World*. As the antiwar movement itself began to conceive of American power in the most Manichean and moralistic terms, it became easier for a new generation of conservatives to subordinate discrete arguments about Vietnam to a broader cultural counterattack.

But, more fundamentally, it is a profound and painful thing to accept that one's country has involved itself in a futile or immoral cause; it is worse still to ask what intellectual or political mistakes led to such a nightmare. Faced with a disastrous war, the most important consideration is not "Were we wrong?" but "*Why* were we wrong?" and "How can we avoid being so wrong in the future?" These are questions that often will implicate the country's leading politicians and intellectuals, and its cherished myths. The anguish of confronting them has been on display in the Democratic Party's foreign policy debate for 35 years.

The results have not always been pretty. But they have been important. It is only when the United States shrinks from asking such agonizing questions that we wade back into agonizing wars. That is a price that conservatives have been willing to pay, as the ugly pre–Iraq war debate vividly displayed. When conservatives achieved power, their 35-year-old willful blindness led the country right back into a quagmire, this time in a desert. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Against the veto.

Poison Pen

BY SANFORD LEVINSON

THIS SUMMER, PRESIDENT Bush issued a veto for the first time. The occasion: a bill—passed by wide but not veto-proof majorities in the House and Senate—that would have expanded federal funding of stem-cell research. Following Bush's announcement, liberals, predictably, denounced his move as a capitulation to the religious right, while conservatives, just as predictably, lauded his commitment to the sanctity of life. What almost no one stopped to consider was whether Bush should have had the ability to veto the bill at all.

Everyone is familiar with the supposed tension between pure democracy and judicial review—namely, that the ability of courts to invalidate state and federal legislation often blocks the outcomes desired by a majority of voters. But, if judicial activism is anti-democratic, then the presidential veto is, well, *very* anti-democratic. Over the course of U.S. history, the Supreme Court has invalidated approximately 165 laws. But presidents have vetoed about 2,550 bills. Congress has overridden only 106 of those vetoes, meaning that the White House has blocked almost 15 times as many federal laws as the Supreme Court. Sometimes, these presidential actions thwart liberal majorities, as in the case of the stem-cell veto, which Americans opposed by a margin of more than 20 percent. On other occasions, it is conservatives who suffer. In 1996, for instance, President Clinton vetoed a ban on partial-birth abortions that was backed by substantial majorities both in Congress and among the American public.

In recent years, of course, we have not had much occasion to witness the power of the veto. Because his party controls Congress, Bush has used the veto sparingly. Clinton, by contrast, shared power for six years with GOP majorities on Capitol Hill, and he vetoed 37 bills. Now, with Democrats surging in House and Senate races around the country, it seems possible that November will bring a return to divided government—meaning that the veto will once again loom large. It is therefore a good time to ask whether American democracy has been well-served by this feature of our constitutional structure. The answer is a resounding no.

THE VETO WAS not always a key tool of executive power; early presidents used it with restraint or, as in the cases of John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and John Quincy Adams, not at all. Things began to change once Andrew Jackson arrived in office and set about expanding the powers of the presidency. Prior to Jackson, according to UCLA political scientist Scott James, "[s]ettled practice authorized vetoes where Congress's authority to legislate in a given area was constitutionally murky, or where hasty consideration produced legislation with remediable technical deficiencies." The veto did *not* operate "to substitute the president's judgment for the Congress's on national policy matters." In the ensuing decades, however, presidents slowly stopped thinking of themselves as mere enforcers of laws passed by an autonomous Congress. The veto gave them power to block legislation they disliked, and the threat of the veto gave them growing influence over how laws took shape. Soon, presidents were key participants in the legislative process.

The shift begun by Jackson points to an important distinction in the kinds of vetoes presidents issue. Presidents take an oath to "preserve, protect, and defend the Constitution," and it therefore makes sense that they—like the Supreme Court—are allowed to block legislation they deem unconstitutional. The question is whether they should be able to block legislation for other reasons—indeed, for any reason they wish. There is international precedent for this distinction. In South Africa, the president can send a bill back to the National Assembly if he believes it to be unconstitutional. If the National Assembly fails to address his concerns, the president has one final option: to refer the legislation to the country's highest court. But, if the court accepts the bill, the president must, too. In other words, the South African president cannot veto a bill simply because he believes it to be unwise.

I have no objection to a Constitution-based veto, even if it is unclear whether the president should, in such circumstances, be allowed the last word. Rather, I am concerned about a system—like the one the United States currently has—under which the president becomes, in effect, a third legislative chamber, able, with the stroke of a pen, to negate the views of up to 289 House members and 66 senators.

What is so wrong with permitting the White House to act as another legislative branch? Put simply, the veto tilts the balance of power in Washington too far toward the status quo. It is already difficult enough to gain the consent of both the House and Senate on legislation, and the veto exacerbates this problem. Advocates of change must capture the House, the Senate, *and* the White House, whereas defenders of the status quo need to win over only one. This sets a high barrier to reform; and paralysis on key issues—such as health care and immigration—is too often the result.

Proponents of the veto might respond that the president represents the entire American people in a way that is not true of Congress. After all, members of Congress represent only their constituents, and there is nothing in the institu-

---

Sanford Levinson is a professor of law and government at the University of Texas in Austin. This article is adapted from his new book, OUR UNDEMOCRATIC CONSTITUTION: WHERE THE CONSTITUTION GOES WRONG (AND HOW WE THE PEOPLE CAN CORRECT IT).

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

tional structure of Congress to encourage even a single member to take a national perspective. If you accept this line of thinking, then the veto, while it may promote the status quo, makes the legislative process more democratic.

But the president isn't nearly as representative of the national will as many assume. The obvious case in point is the 2000 election—in which Al Gore won a plurality of the national vote while losing the presidency—but that is hardly the only example. Texas A&M political scientist George Edwards argues persuasively in a recent book that Richard Nixon received more popular votes than John F. Kennedy in 1960. Three additional presidents (Harry Truman in 1948; Nixon in 1968; and Clinton in both 1992 and 1996) failed to win popular majorities, while another (Gerald Ford) never received a single vote at all.

Even for those presidents who do manage to get 50 percent of the vote, the electoral college badly weakens their claim to represent the entire nation. Modern presidential campaigns take place almost exclusively in battleground states, making the vast majority of voters utterly irrelevant. A full 99 percent of all advertising expenditures during the 2004 race occurred in just 17 states; Florida and Ohio alone accounted for more than 45 percent. Because elections are lost or won in just a few states, presidents have little incentive to care about voters in much of the country. Steelworkers in Ohio invariably count for more than residents of nonbattleground states like New York and Texas. The president may be a more national figure than any single representative or senator, but the modern presidency is almost certainly a less national institution than the House or Senate taken as a whole.

IT GOES WITHOUT saying that recent proposals to give presidents line-item veto authority would enhance their power over legislation—and make this problem even worse. These proposals show how fearful Americans remain of truly majoritarian politics. There may, of course, be legitimate reasons for these fears; good arguments against democracy go back at least to the time of Plato. But most people read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution as embracing popular government. And popular government, if it means anything, must mean a relatively robust form of majority rule, save when basic rights of vulnerable minorities are threatened.

To block legislation at the Supreme Court, it takes a majority of five justices, each of whom has been confirmed by the Senate. The veto, by contrast, is the tool of one person acting alone—one person whose claim to speak for the majority of Americans is dubious at best. Given how much energy has been expended in recent years debating the proper role of the judiciary, it is at least worth raising the question of whether our government would be better off—more efficient, more responsive, more democratic—without a presidential veto. ■

GOOD OLE GOY

BY T.A. FRANK

The notion peddled by the [James] Webb campaign that I am somehow embarrassed by my heritage is . . . offensive. . . . I embrace and take great pride in every aspect of my diverse heritage, including my Lumbroso family line's Jewish heritage, which I learned about from a recent magazine article and my mother confirmed. . . . I still had a ham sandwich for lunch, and my mother made great pork chops.

—Recent statements of Virginia Senator George Allen

STATEMENT FROM SENATOR GEORGE ALLEN, OCTOBER 3, 2006:

I've been asked to clarify my feelings further, since I've been falsely accused of being embarrassed about my so-called Jewish heritage. Bubkes. I am absolutely bursting with pride over having distant, distant connections to Jews that have been wildly exaggerated. But this doesn't change who I am. That's why I still had a ham sandwich for lunch and my mother still made great pork chops for Shabbes. Breakfast was the usual side of bacon drizzled with pork lard, while, for lunch, Mom cooked us a whole roast suckling pig that we washed down with a vat of its mother's milk while blasting Götterdämmerung.

STATEMENT FROM SENATOR GEORGE LUMBROSO ALLEN, OCTOBER 7, 2006:

It seems my earlier statements about my heritage have caused some controversy, so let me try to set the record straight. I am truly thrilled to be connected, even if incredibly remotely, to all these Jews. It only strengthens my commitment to Christianity, or, as I like to think of it, Judaism 2.0. And I've told my mother that she's still the same old Mom as far as I'm concerned. Look, let's grab this issue by the horns: I ain't no good ole goy. I have a deep respect for all citizens of this great state, especially its talented football-playing *shvartzes*. And I'm ecstatic to have a minor Jewish tributary flowing into the great, overwhelmingly Aryan river of my heritage.

STATEMENT FROM SENATOR GEORGE LUMBROSO LIEBERMAN ALLEN, OCTOBER 10, 2006:

I'm here today to say I'm deeply sorry that some people took my recent words the wrong way. I have tremendous respect for the Jewish race, which I rank way above many others, and I had no intention of provoking its extreme sensitivity. I would like to take it one step further and meet with Jewish leaders—elders?—to discern the best path for healing. I also intend to repatriate my mother to Eretz Yisrael, so that she might live among her own remarkable people. But none of that changes how much I enjoy wrapping myself in a Confederate prayer shawl and eating enormous slabs of pork encased in shellfish. L'chaim.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Descending into the ninth circle of Washington Hell.

The Shadow Capitol

BY THOMAS FRANK

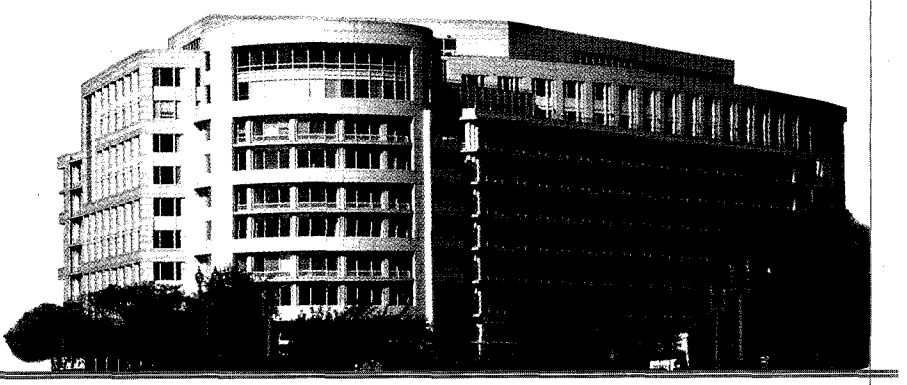
You know you're getting close to the spectacular white office building at 101 Constitution Avenue when you start seeing lobbyists buzzing around like bees near a hive. With a little practice, the lobbyists are easy to distinguish from lesser drones: They are the ones who look like caricatures of prosperous men, dressed in a way that is no doubt meant to suggest "affluent businessman" but in which no proper businessman in Chicago or Kansas City would ever, in fact, dress himself. In most of the United States, male office-wear tends toward the drab; the lobbyist, by contrast, fancies himself Beau Brummell. He appears to choose each element of his ensemble for its conspicuous priciness, but to give no thought to the whole. You can spot him in the field by his perfectly fitted thousand-dollar suits, usually in blue; his strangely dainty shoes; his shirts, which are often the kind that come in pink or blue with white collars and cuffs, the latter of which display cufflinks of the large and shiny variety; his vivid, shimmering ties, these days preferably in orange or lavender; his perfect haircut; the tiny flag attesting to his perfect patriotism on his perfect lapel; his perfect tan.

One of the most arresting sights in Washington, D.C., is when you notice one of these fussily dressed and pleasant-smelling creatures out of their element—say, dragging their Tumi luggage down a broken sidewalk near the bus station in the 100-degree heat. But, here at 101 Con, they are right at home. They come striding into the Charlie Palmer Steak restaurant and the air-conditioning is blasting and their teeth are exactly right and their ties jut gamely from their collars. The gang's all here, a bunch of real straight shooters, and they extend their hands to the committee chairman, and all the handsome fellows share a laugh together as they take their seats among scurrying waiters and huge vases of cut flowers.

You can offshore nearly any kind of job these days—ship your factory to Mexico and send your back office to India—but your lobbyists have to stay in Washington. The rest of the hard, old, face-to-face world may dissolve, but lobbying remains stubbornly rooted in the necessities of physical proximity to power and, of course, to tasty eats. At 101 Constitution, both of these can be found in fantastic abundance, and this has made the building a landmark for our political times, as the Watergate was for the 1970s and the "little green house" (where officials sold government favors in the Harding days) was for the 1920s. 101 Con is K Street in a box, a private-sector Pentagon where ten stories of lobbyists plot their next thrust on behalf of the life-insurance industry, the mining industry, or the retail hardware industry.

Form follows function, as they say, and 101 Con is admirably suited to the task of paid persuasion. From its very design, it's apparent that this building was intended to reel in earmarks the way a steel mill makes steel or a grain elevator stores wheat. To begin with, 101 Con is the closest commercial property to the Capitol building, literally just across a traffic island from the Capitol grounds. This means "members," as the men and women of Congress are called, can scoot over and back in a matter of minutes. The building's upper stories have an astonishing view of the Capitol dome, a quality exploited by the prominent turret that juts toward Constitution Avenue. This protuberance is topped by a rooftop terrace, where fund-raising events can be held against the striking panorama (rent starts at $10,000 a night, I was told); smaller balconies on the lower floors permit regular tenants to hold their own parties with the same backdrop. The tangible value of this view—namely, that it impresses clients—is often mentioned in news stories. The intangible value, I imagine, is that it also allows the lobbyists, like captains of industry in old advertisements, to look out grandly over the assembly line where their product is manufactured.

The building's ground floor houses the very large and very luxurious Charlie Palmer Steak restaurant, world-famous dealers in "artisan meats" and fine wines. This latter being one of the baseline currencies of the influence trade, the bottles are stored in an ostentatious glass "wine cube" perched on a platform over an indoor pond, like a Philip Johnson building in captivity. In theory, I suppose, having the

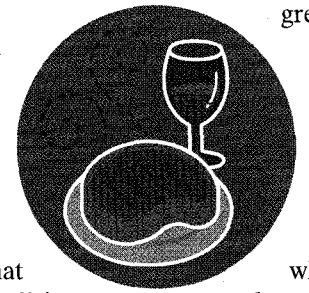


EMPORIS IMAGES

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

wine room elevated and transparent in this way means that a dedicated, score-keeping fan of lobbying, if such a thing exists, could actually determine which particular vintage was being uncorked to advance which particular political cause.

Put the wine, the view, the steaks, and the location together with luxury furnishings and exceptional air-conditioning and you can fairly count on the place to swarm with Bush Pioneer- and Ranger-level fund-raisers. Even the elevators have been designed with lobbying in mind: "Since many of these tenants make regular trips to lobby their powerful neighbors across the street," their manufacturer boasts, "we're proud to think of the 15 custom elevators that we fabricated for the building as the first stage in the journey toward the creation of new laws." All that's missing, really, is a bullet train to the golf course.



The architects have done their job well. 101 Con is a "trophy-class" building with rents to prove it. The building hosts fund-raisers or receptions of one kind or another virtually all the time when Congress is in session; according to *Roll Call*, PAC fund-raisers make up fully 25 percent of Charlie Palmer Steak's business. I was told by one restaurant employee that business had suffered since the Jack Abramoff affair, with its lurid tales of sushi-crazed legislators selling themselves for finger-sized bites of raw fish. But, according to the most recent study conducted by Bloomberg, the restaurant ranked second in popularity among members to the Caucus Room—a nearby establishment where they've cut out the middleman: The restaurant itself is *owned* by lobbyists.

As I write this, I am looking at a $20 Davidoff cigar of the kind that a waiter at Charlie Palmer Steak insisted was Tom DeLay's favorite. I have propped it up on my desk as a kind of souvenir, a reminder of how this city works. The waiter had been describing for me a dinner party attended by the former majority leader the night before, and he had concluded with the following explanation of the restaurant's (and the building's, and DeLay's) success: "Access is power and power is money." Were tobacco advertising still permitted on television, it would make a perfect jingle for Davidoff cigars. Translated into Latin, it might be the new national motto. In homage to this waiter's wisdom, let us begin our survey here, at Charlie Palmer.

VISITORS TO WASHINGTON who want to see democracy in action traditionally waste their time at the viewing galleries of the Capitol building, where—if they are lucky—they might see one or two legislators mumbling mechanically for the C-SPAN cameras. It is, as everyone knows, a big letdown—a disillusionment that is cited whenever smart young people relate how they got to be so wise to the world.

My advice to those visitors: Walk across the street to Charlie Palmer Steak. This is the place for political spectatorship in the age of Abramoff, where you can see the questions before the nation actually being resolved—and can do it over a meal, too, saving yourself a trip to Applebee's later. Start with the miniature lobster corndogs, $9, a nod to the deep-fried treats of your red-state youth (but made with *lobster*, get it?), and then slyly bribe yourself with a plateful of the domestic Kobe sirloin, $68. Wash the whole thing down with a half-dozen Manhattans—you will need them. Look around you while you eat: This is not the dim, windowless steakhouse of your weekend debauches in Wichita. It is light; it is open; its polished limestone walls are accented with Wedgwood blue; a curtain of glass showcases the prominent, prosperous diners to the sweating world outside. See that pond burbling in the middle of the restaurant? And the heavy steel ingot they use to prop up your menu?

It's because of classy touches like these that your congressman is never moving back to your home state, regardless of what he says about "sharing your values."

Speaking of that congressman of yours: If you're lucky, you will see him here. Indeed, for the price of that steak you can watch him and his fellow members make decisions that will affect you for the rest of your life. And, when they do, you will see that they're making these decisions in close consultation with non-members—people just like you, in fact, only with better hair, better clothes, better manners, and a better job working for far richer and more important companies than yours.

I showed up at Charlie Palmer one evening in July, only minutes, I was assured, after Tom DeLay had departed. I took up a post with an advantageous view, fortified myself with a few drinks, and watched the proceedings unfold. A parade of well-dressed VIPs poured by—top SEC personnel, important aides, U.S. senators, numerous representatives, former White House officials, and lobbyists of every stripe—all of them dressed perfectly and wearing expressions of unflappable satisfaction, if not outright hilarity. A contented-looking fellow in a vivid yellow tie was whispered to be the aide who made some congressman a populist. A man squeezed through the jolly crowd wearing a weathered face and a shirt embroidered with the words MISSOURI CORN GROWERS ASSOCIATION. A party rumored to be a Big Pharma affair roared on in a private dining room just behind the bar.

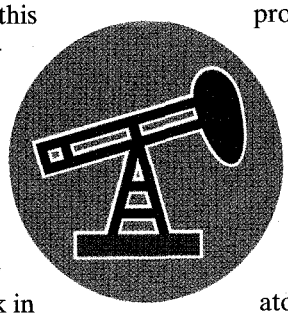
Who are these special beings who pay for—and, in some cases, write—the laws that govern our lives?

To meet them, you must persuade the lobby guards at 101 Con to let you into the building proper. (No easy feat: There are no public viewing galleries for the work that's done in these offices.) Take an elevator to one of the building's upper stories. As you stroll around, you will notice that the offices are often decorated with those handshake pictures that are so popular in Washingon—photographic proof of a given lobbyist's intimacy with politicians and a much more useful tool in establishing one's professional bona fides than any college degree. You will also see model airplanes, model motorcycles, and other carefully arranged

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

bric-a-brac that are normally reminders of leisure-time fun in the outside world. Here, they are strictly business: reminders of the industry for which legislative favors are sought. And, always, looming magnificently in the background, is That View: the bleached dome of the U.S. Capitol.

THINK OF THE elevator ride upward as Dante's descent into hell, but in reverse and with ten stops instead of nine. Let's begin our tour at the midway point, the fifth floor, home to (among others) the National Mining Association (NMA), an industry group that is mainly concerned with promoting coal and that furthers its agenda with large campaign contributions, mainly to Republicans. In 2004, this outfit sponsored a grassroots effort called "Mine the Vote," in which mine-owners introduced mine-workers to their favored candidates. (I know of no organization at 101 Con, or anywhere in this town, dedicated to doing the reverse.) Very plutocratic of them, but also very effective: The program is said to have helped Bush prevail in the once reliably Democratic state of West Virginia.



The National Mining Association spends millions on lobbying every year. In fact, it does so much lobbying that it must hire other lobbying firms to augment its own efforts. Back in the 1990s, one of those outside shops was National Environmental Strategies, headed by J. Steven Griles, a man whose best-known environmental strategy had been to permit oil-drilling off the coast of California when he was a government official in the 1980s. With the advent of the Bush administration in 2001, Griles took a trip back through that revolving door you've heard about and accepted a job as the number-two at the Department of the Interior, making policy on the very matters that had concerned him as a lobbyist. Then, in 2005, Griles headed for the exit yet again, this time after being accused of doing favors for Abramoff's Indian casino clients, whose operations are also regulated by the Interior Department. Today, he's back in the saddle, lobbying for the energy industry—for a time from an office that was *also* on the fifth floor of 101 Con.

Until last year, the head of the NMA's in-house lobbying operations was one John Shelk, an expert on energy issues who got his start, like many lobbyists, working for the congressional body charged with overseeing those issues—in this case, the House Energy and Commerce Committee. He later proceeded to lobby his old colleagues on behalf of none other than Enron, which was then spending tens of millions "spreading the gospel of deregulation," as a Shelk profile in a trade magazine put it. When pushing coal for the National Mining Association, of course, Shelk claimed to have only the consumer in mind, but the religion ultimately is unchanged from the Enron days: "The point is for people who believe in markets to stick together," he says. The trade magazine also noted that Shelk's office features that trump card of Lobbyland—a picture of the lobbyist shaking hands with Karl Rove.

On your way back to the elevator, try to find the office of high-tech conglomerate Honeywell. Here, the attraction is not so much the lobbyists themselves, but rather the high-tech lobbying machine that the company has built, a multi-room audio-visual exhibit detailing all the ways the company is involved in your life, from warheads to cars to surveillance equipment. There is even a flight simulator—reportedly popular with members who stop by to get a little aeronautical exercise.

Now it's on to floor six, where you can visit the offices of Van Scoyoc Associates. The first time I heard about Van Scoyoc was when a lobbyist friend insisted to me, in hushed tones, that the people at this prestigious and respected D.C. firm were specialists in earmarks—those little pet pork projects that individual legislators like to insert into bills quietly and at the last minute. I didn't believe him at first. After all, these days earmarks are the very symbol of misgovernment and corruption. They are the $200 million "Bridge to Nowhere" in Alaska; the bribery price list that Duke Cunningham drew up for the convenience of his regular customers; the numerous favors Montana Senator Conrad Burns allegedly did for Abramoff. I know in the abstract that lobbyists are involved in the process, of course. Earmarks are the juiciest *quid* that House members have to sell; the lobbyists are there to furnish the *quo*, in the form of wine, steak, cigars, golf weekends, campaign contributions, and airline tickets to romantic places. But, I wondered, could it really be so open, so unconcealed? A firm that *specializes* in earmarks? That's like putting a sign on your door that says DEALERS IN GRAFT AND BOODLE.

So naïve am I. According to a recent story in *The New York Times*, the buying and selling of earmarks is now so routine that even municipalities are getting into the act, hiring lobbyists to induce their own elected officials in Washington to do their jobs. According to a recent article in *CQ Weekly*, lobbying accounts in the field of "Budget and appropriations" (i.e., earmarks) have tripled since 1998; it is, today, the single largest category for lobbying activity. The number-one firm in the field: Van Scoyoc Associates, of 101 Constitution Avenue.

The firm employs a staff of 90 and claims to boast a client list of over 300, including (according to the firm's publicity materials) 50 universities and 20 of the nation's largest corporations. Van Scoyoc seems particularly proud of its success in the rapidly growing field of academic earmarks, whereby some research project or institute is funded directly by Congress instead of through the usual process—you know, where scholars or bureaucrats look the proposal over and decide whether it's a good idea or not. One example of how this works, according to data provided by Public Citizen: From 1998 to 2006, the University of Alabama paid Van

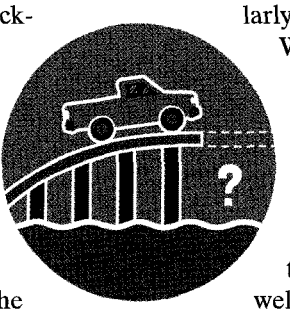
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Scoyoc $1.5 million; over that same period, the various officers of the firm contributed at least $123,500 to Alabama Senator Richard Shelby (two of the firm's vice presidents are, in fact, former staffers of Shelby's); and, during those years, Shelby earmarked some $150 million for the University of Alabama.

Every element of this chain is, of course, formally unconnected to every other—innocent and wholesome as a newborn babe. But imagine, for a moment, that this is exactly the racket it appears to be. That is to say, what if the company's officers were really able to charge clients $1.5 million for making contributions of $123,500 (a twelvefold increase) and if the University of Alabama turned $1.5 million in lobbying fees into $150 million in earmarks (a hundredfold increase) and if Shelby himself pocketed $123,500 in campaign donations just for greasing the skids when the call came from 101 Con.

Surely you know the liturgy of conservative Washington by now: Government doesn't work, the private sector is so much more efficient, and so on. Still, I can't help but marvel at how much everyone would have saved had we just cut out the middleman and had Shelby do his job.

UP ANOTHER FLOOR, on seven, we find the offices of the Federal Policy Group, the lobbying arm of Clark Consulting. Though the tenants of 101 Con are people with great power over the public welfare, they are generally not public figures. A welcome exception to this rule, however, is the boss-man of the Federal Policy Group, Ken Kies. Unlike most other lobbyists, Kies does interviews, writes articles, and even appears on television. This is because he is no mere chortling backslapper in an orange tie, but rather a bona fide expert on a difficult subject. Kies is one of the greatest living authorities on the U.S. tax code; over the last 20 years, Republicans have come to him whenever they have wanted to rewrite tax law.



It turns out, however, that letting a lobbyist have a say in writing the tax code is not a particularly good idea. Jeffrey Birnbaum tells the story of a 1989 incident in which Kies, who had left the staff of the House Ways and Means Committee a short time before, came back to his old friends at the Committee seeking a tax exemption for his new friend—an iron-ore outfit that had hired him as a lobbyist. Kies's pals on the Hill were not only happy to oblige, they actually let Kies come up with a tax increase on somebody else (in this case, cell phone users) to replace the revenue lost in the exemption that they granted Kies's client.

With the Republican conquest of Congress in 1994, Kies went back on the public payroll, now as chief of staff for the Joint Committee on Taxation, a position of such authority and prestige that articles from the time reported him to be more popular on the corporate lecture circuit than his nominal bosses on the committee. In 1998, Kies was back through the revolving door for good, once again dreaming up justifications for the very particular changes to the tax code that his very wealthy clients wanted. "I've never seen a guy who's got an influence over the tax chairman like he has," a tax official told THE NEW REPUBLIC in 2000. His employer's website actually lists the results: Regulations reversed, laws averted, rulings withdrawn, corporate tax deductions retroactively allowed—more lawmaking activity than Congress itself, almost. And it is, all of it, for sale.

Upward once again to floor eight. Until recently, this was the home of the American Security Council (ASC), where the visitor could wade deep into the murky waters of the extreme right, better known today as the responsible mainstream. The ASC was founded in 1955 by a consortium of old-school Chicago tycoons who wanted what a 1971 account calls "a blacklist service," or, more accurately, a master list of all the suspected subversives, radicals, and leftists in the land. To this end, the ASC reportedly tried to get its hands on the files of ole Joe McCarthy.

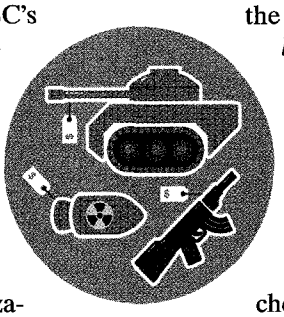
Wherever there's a well-funded red-hunting scheme afoot, though, things seem to get out of hand quickly. In its early days, the ASC was run by former FBI agents, but, before long, the group had connections with the John Birch Society and was giving a helping hand to the House Un-American Activities Committee. Its letterhead was ennobled with an impressive string of retired generals and admirals, one of whom was lampooned in *Dr. Strangelove*. Its focus evolved as well—from identifying unacceptably liberal organizations and individuals to advocating a more aggressive stance toward communist regimes abroad, particularly the one in China. The group moved to Washington, where its list of corporate members expanded from a few medieval-minded Chicagoans to encompass the entire range of military contractors. Between its generals, its arms manufacturers, and its strategic thinkers, the ASC soon became, as a liberal author put it, "the embodiment of the military-industrial complex." (This was not an unwelcome characterization, by the way. For his 1983 book, *Peddlers of Crisis*, Jerry W. Sanders asked an ASC official if he disliked the phrase. "His reply was emphatic. 'Hell no—if our military and industry can't get together how are we going to defend our country?' He added, 'The military-industrial complex is a very healthy thing despite the fact it's downgraded in the press.' ")

And, of course, the ASC commenced lobbying. The international scene has changed dramatically over the years, but the ASC's demand on Congress has remained obsessively consistent: Spend more on the military. It doesn't matter how much we are already spending, and it doesn't matter if Russian communism is gone or if the Sandinistas are no longer in power or if Red China is now the number-one manufacturer of, well, everything: We must spend more—on aircraft carriers, on nuclear earth-penetrator weapons, on

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

missile defense. To back all this up, in 1970 the ASC developed what seems to have been the very first legislative rating system, in which senators and representatives are graded by how they vote on the various issues of interest to an organization. It is a common technique today, used by everyone from the Christian Coalition to the ACLU, but at the time, it was something of a novelty—bitterly resented by the liberals that it targeted.

The ASC's heyday came in the '70s, when it assembled a mighty host of organizations into a "Coalition for Peace Through Strength" to decry Soviet military superiority and oppose the SALT treaties. Then, under the presidency of coalition member Ronald Reagan, the ASC's every defense-spending dream was fulfilled. Today, though, the ASC is an aging and feeble bird in the hawks' aerie, overshadowed by such virile new "peddlers of crisis" as the Project for the New American Century and the Center for Security Policy.



Still, the organization soldiers on, publishing its voting index and shrieking eternally for *more*. To all appearances, it is a benign organization now—its extremist past locked away for good.

But a curious incident a few years ago shows how persistent the old patterns can be. It seems that one of the ASC's confusing subsidiary groups had Jack Abramoff on its board. This was not strange by itself—Abramoff was a right-winger from way back who had been involved in an ASC-organized campaign when he was head of the College Republicans in the early '80s. But now the roles were reversed. It was Abramoff, not the aging red-hunters, who was doing the dirty work for the corporate crowd—in this case, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, where a handful of garment manufacturers needed a little bit of lobbying help to keep their, shall we say, *curious* labor arrangements legal. And it was the ASC that furnished the cover for an Abramoff-organized campaign to bring lawmakers to the islands in order to win their goodwill. Under the guise of the subsidiary group, the ASC took two Democratic congressmen on a trip to the islands, the expenses for which were ultimately paid by Abramoff.

It is a tragic trajectory by the standards of Washington, this tale of one group's decline from roaring warrior to lobbyist plaything—from defending the beloved homeland to shilling for a low-wage hell. But it is also a most precise metaphor for this city we live in and for what its masters have wreaked on the country they rule.

TAKE THE ELEVATOR on up to nine. (We're almost there!) Here, you may note the conference rooms where public policy is made by the private sector, the leather upholstery and star-spangled light fixtures and domed ceilings made of polished wood. Walk to the large, empty triangular room with the balcony beyond and the by-now-tiresome view. You are standing near the site of one of the most storied events in lobbying history: Tom DeLay's Thanksgiving fund-raiser of November 17, 2005. Those were dark days for "the Hammer": He had been indicted in Texas and had resigned his position as majority leader; several of his former associates had been implicated in the Abramoff scandal, and guilty pleas were just around the corner. But Tom DeLay would not be intimidated. He stared the world down with those unblinking exterminator's eyes and conspicuously scheduled one last, great blowout—the biggest fund-raiser of the year.

And it was a success, too. A lobbyist friend explained the rationale to me: *DeLay just might survive this episode*, the participants thought, *and, if he does, I want to be his friend*. So the call went forth, and the private sector arose as one, a mighty host shoveling the money in a colossal show of "moral support," as one of them described it to *The Washington Post*. The National Association of Manufacturers attended, as did the Refiners and the Truckers. The roll call of industry went on: Oil! Coal! Gas! Electricity! Petrochemical! Wall Street! On into the night, on that delirious ninth floor of 101 Con, they did homage to their friend and paid their dues for the years of good government he had given them.

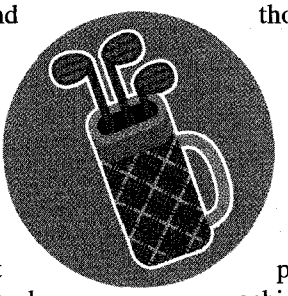
DeLay's celebration of his own shamelessness was hardly the only commemoration of GOP Washington held at 101 Con last fall. Hop back in the elevator and make your way up to the fabulous rooftop terrace. (Along the way, you'll pass the tenth-floor office of Goldman Sachs, whose chief was recently promoted to Treasury secretary.) Here, you will find yourself at the site where, in September 2005, *The Weekly Standard* feted its first decade of publication.

Like DeLay, and Republican DC generally, *The Weekly Standard* got its start with the Gingrich revolution. (I still have a copy of Number 1, with a warrior Newt on the cover.) Ten years later, there was no better vantage point than the roof of 101 Con for the *Standard* gang to look out over the conquered Capitol and savor all that they had wrought. Owner Rupert Murdoch himself was on hand to acknowledge the adulation of his courtiers (from close up, his skin and hair appear synthetic, I am told), while Senators Bill Frist and John McCain and former Attorney General John Ashcroft paid homage, and Senator Joe Lieberman was spotted scurrying furtively away, as if stalked by some future Republican self. The gala was decorated with immense blow-ups of *Weekly Standard* covers over the years, many of them proclaiming the imminent threat posed by Saddam Hussein, and the conversation swirled around Hurricane Katrina, which had inundated New Orleans two weeks previously. The general consensus among partygoers, according to one of them, was that the president would not be hurt as long as the body count stayed in the low four figures. Lobster was served. Katherine Harris appeared oiled.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WHICH BRINGS US to the strangest twist in the story of 101 Constitution: This showplace of corporate power is owned by a labor union, the United Brotherhood of Carpenters (UBC). Before it was built, the site was occupied by a standard-issue union headquarters, a "marble mausoleum," as one Carpenters official described it to me. The Carpenters are still here, of course: They maintain offices on the tenth floor and claim to dedicate the considerable revenue generated by the building to their organizing efforts. Though there are few overt signs of their presence, if you look closely there are clues indicating the building's provenance. From the parquet marble floor in the lobby to the finely polished elevator doors to the exotic wood paneling, the visitor is constantly aware of the building's slightly excessive craftsmanship. (Everything here was designed, the union's magazine says, "to go beyond just good enough.") If a visitor happens to forget who is responsible for all this quality, he is reminded by an enormous mural in the lobby that depicts a hard-hatted carpenter, naked from the waist up, taking a break from his construction job to gaze at the Capitol dome. As presumably the sole bit of monumental social realism executed in the nation's capital during the Bush years, by the way, this mural ought to put the building on the tourist's map all by itself.

If you're a liberal optimist, you might see 101 Con as an ingenious detournement of Washington's hyper-capitalist culture, its rent helping to strengthen the ranks of the labor movement, the very thing the hyper-capitalist culture dreads most. Buy the senator another slab of artisan meat, Mr. Business Lobbyist! Sip your fizzy Italian water and go at your BlackBerry with both thumbs! Surely the joke is on you.



Only it isn't, really. While I myself find it gratifying to see corporate types obliged to pay rent to a labor union, the UBC isn't exactly the adversarial organization that one might hope. For one thing, it has been engaged for ten years now in a centralization scheme that involves stripping power from its local unions—and, in theory, from its rank-and-file members—and concentrating that power in regional councils. The union's president, Douglas McCarron, is also reportedly fond of corporate-style rhetoric, exhorting his membership to consider what their (imaginary) stockholders would think, according to a Canadian carpenters' newsletter, and describing the central union's income as "profit"—turns of phrase that sound harmless enough to outsiders but that rub some union types the wrong way.

Surely you have guessed what comes next: that, of all the labor leaders in the United States, it is this particular labor leader who has earned the friendship of George W. Bush, the most anti-labor president since ... maybe since Karl Rove's hero, William McKinley. McCarron has hosted Bush at the union's Labor Day picnics; Bush has hosted McCarron on Air Force One; McCarron was the only labor leader to speak at Bush's economic summit in 2002; that same year, Bush spoke at the UBC's political conference, where he congratulated the union for—of course—opening its new building at 101 Constitution. The payoff for Bush: In the 2004 election, which many unionists perceived as the most important in their lifetimes, the Carpenters proudly and with great fanfare endorsed nobody.

In Bush's salute to 101 Con, he claimed to find inspiration in the attendance of both Senator Ted Kennedy and Labor Secretary Elaine Chao at the building's dedication. The implied bipartisanship, the president said, was "a good sign as to how ... Washington ought to deal with problems." Democrats and Republicans, labor and big business—all of them coming together under one roof in Bush's Washington.

But on whose terms? Who gets to party on that roof?

The architecture of 101 Constitution again supplies the answer. Whenever I have wandered its halls, I have noticed a pattern of segregation by class. The lobbyists eat at Charlie Palmer, with its ranks of servile waiters; for everyone else, there is the "Capitol Cafe" on the exact opposite side of the building, a nearly windowless deli where the minimalism (its walls are painted cinderblock) comes from cheapness, not a taste for subtlety. The building is also, bizarrely, home to a Washington Gas payment center in addition to the lobbyists' offices, which ensures that poor and sometimes desperate District residents can be found straying into the wrong part of the building's lobby. In the elevator, I once commented to a woman that the building must be a nice place to work. "It's nice if you've got one of those offices facing the Capitol," she shot back. "Not so nice for the rest of us."

What "the rest of us" look over, ironically, is the brutal concrete shoebox of the Frances Perkins Building, in whose bowels toil the employees of the most disrespected federal department of them all, the Department of Labor, where the adminstration's philosophy of *slam that sucker into reverse* has achieved its greatest results—the elevation of hilariously unqualified people to positions of great authority; the shift of emphasis from protecting workers to policing them. The two buildings are not just neighbors on Constitution Avenue; they are opposites, physical representations of two different visions of government. One worldview sinks and the other rises, clad in glowing white limestone and ringing with the happy hubbub of commercialized politics.

After visiting 101 Con one day, I head over to the Labor Department, where I notice actual workers silently replacing the pavers in the terrace. What kind of workers, I wonder, does the Department of Labor hire when it needs work done on its own building? The first worker I approach can't say; he doesn't speak much English. The foreman, though, is happy to answer the question: they are nonunion, he says.

Maybe they could use a lobbyist. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

BOOKS & THE ARTS

STANLEY KAUFFMANN ON FILMS

Liberalizers

ABOUT TONY KUSHNER AS a playwright, debate continues. About Kushner as a human being, the matter is settled. A new documentary, called **WRESTLING WITH ANGELS: PLAYWRIGHT TONY KUSHNER**, presents the Jacob who wrestled with angels in America, now doing most of his wrestling with devils. The essence of the film is that this man, with not a touch of evangelistic pomp, cannot conceive of life as anything other than a campaign to improve life.

WRESTLING WITH ANGELS: PLAYWRIGHT TONY KUSHNER
(Balcony)

AL FRANKEN: GOD SPOKE
(Balcony)

Freida Lee Mock, an admirably skilled documentarian, followed Kushner from just after 9/11 until the 2004 presidential election. Much of this time was of course spent in or around the theater, but it becomes clear that Kushner believes in his theater work as a source of strength and possibility for other aspects of his life.

Like Bernard Shaw in just this one respect, Kushner takes his playwriting as an enabler. Because of his fame, he is invited to universities and conferences and other public occasions where he speaks. He talks about current politics and its stench, but mostly about ways to live and choose. For instance, at a college commencement, he tells the graduates what they are really commencing. Always he is briskly articulate (the Taliban are "theocratic thugs") and irrepressibly genuine. What especially distinguishes his talks is their transmuted anger; the loathing of what he sees around him is transformed into concern for other people. And below that concern is a fear of despair.

The film takes us to Lake Charles, the Louisiana town where Kushner was born and brought up, and he goes visiting. We see the office of the lumber business where, he notes with pride and respect, his grandfather and uncle and father worked. We visit the temple that he attended, where they still have some of his childhood paintings on the wall, along with memorials to his grandparents. And we meet his father, who helps, in his very self, to explain the humanism of his son. (I kept wishing I were somehow related to that lovely man.) The elder Kushner, a music lover, talks about learning that his son is homosexual. After the initial jolt, he began to think of what Tchaikovsky's father must have felt about his son. ("I would have been so proud I couldn't see straight.") And at the father's eightieth birthday party, where the son reads a witty poem in his honor, Kushner père speaks the opening of Browning's "Rabbi ben Ezra": "Grow old along with me!/ The best is yet to be . . ."

In and around New York we see where the son lives—the dwellings improve along with his income—and we encounter friends, especially Oskar Eustis, the head of the Public Theater in New York. We attend Kushner's same-sex (Jewish) marriage to his longtime partner. In the theater scenes, much of the backstage stuff is familiar in tone, but enjoyable if (like me) you enjoy such stuff. We attend a rehearsal of a children's opera for which he did the English text, an opera that had been performed at Theresienstadt before the children were taken to Auschwitz. We attend rehearsals of Kushner's play *Homebody/Kabul* and of his musical *Caroline, or Change*, which is about a ten-year-old Louisiana boy and his family's black maid. (This segment is interwoven with facts about Kushner's boyhood.) My one wriggle in the biographical material came with the frequent shots of Kushner at his desk, writing. How does one write for the camera?

Clips recur from the HBO film of *Angels in America*, which was wonderfully cast. Where else can we see Meryl Streep as an Orthodox rabbi? Streep also figures in a telling moment elsewhere. At a meeting in a church, she reads a prayer that Kushner wrote about AIDS, reproving God for not taking better care of things. It ends: "Pay more attention! Amen."

Especially in the moving moments, this film prods us into a kind of reproof. Kushner is now fifty, a prime writing age, and we want more. Meanwhile, there is this portrait. Warts and all (and there aren't that many warts), he is one of his best productions. In his afterword for the book of *Angels in America*, he wrote:

> Together we organize the world for ourselves, or at least we organize our understanding of it; we reflect it, refract it, criticize it, grieve over its savagery and help each other to discern, amidst the gathering dark, paths of resistance, pockets of peace and places from whence hope may be plausibly expected. Marx was right: The smallest individual human unit is two people, not one; one is a fiction.

May Kushner write many more plays, but in any case it is good to have such a man around.

Postscript. I didn't know how to work the following into the piece above, but since it is relevant, I append it here. In 2003 Kushner wrote an essay on Eugene O'Neill for the program of *Mourning Becomes Electra* at the National Theatre of London, which was then published in longer form in the *Times Literary Supplement*, and finally appeared in its entirety in the Hunter On-line Theater Review (*www.hotreview.org*). The essay is keen, appreciative, valuable.

Then there is Al Franken. More, there is a documentary called **AL FRANKEN: GOD SPOKE**. The title, like others of his titles, such as *Al Franken: The Truth (With Jokes)*, is supposed to convey modesty through self-deprecation at the same time that it isn't kidding. Franken is a comedian now employing his stand-up experience in liberal politics—on the radio (a good deal), in television (when he

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

can), and in person, at meetings of one kind or another, plus regular gigs.

This film by Nick Doob and Chris Hegedus forces us to make some decisions about him. For myself, I find him generally gross, in person and in manner. In the past, his jokes, at political meetings on television, were funny and sharp. Now that he is more fully involved in politics, his comedy consists mostly of a comic's manner, rather than good gags. (The one joke he tells at length is atrocious.)

An angel on one of my shoulders warns me against adverse remarks about someone who is a fervent liberal. On the other shoulder another angel reminds me that, first, Franken's facile assumptions are not much help to the liberal cause, and, second, that he preaches to the choir. Quite unlike Kushner, no one but an already convinced liberal could want to hear Franken. The Doob-Hegedus film makes that unfortunately clear. ■

David Nirenberg

Paleologus and Us

What Benedict really said.

"Faith, Reason, and the University: Memories and Reflections"—the title seems an unlikely one for a papal speech that has triggered protests, even violence, across large parts of the Muslim world. Benedict XVI's remarks, made on September 12 at the University of Regensburg, where he was once a professor, have been denounced by the parliament of Pakistan, protesters in India, Iraq's Sunni leadership, the top Shiite cleric of Lebanon, the prime minister of Malaysia, and the president of Indonesia, among many others. Less verbal critics (that is putting it much too politely) have thrown firebombs at churches in the West Bank and murdered a nun in Somalia. In Turkey, where the pope is scheduled to visit in November, the deputy leader of the governing Islamic party characterized Benedict's thinking as dark and medieval, the result of a Crusader mentality that "has not benefited from the spirit of reform in the Christian world," and predicted that "he is going down in history in the same category as leaders such as Hitler and Mussolini."

It is the rare homily, and certainly the rare academic talk, that triggers firebombs and comparisons to Hitler. So what did the pope actually say? At the center of the storm are a few lines of his remarks, quoted from the "dialogue with a Muslim" that the Byzantine emperor Manuel II Paleologus claimed to have had in the winter of 1391–1392:

> Show me just what Muhammad brought that was new, and there you will find things only evil and inhuman, such as his command to spread by the sword the faith he preached.... God is not pleased by blood.... Faith is born of the soul, not the body. Whoever would lead someone to faith needs the ability to speak well and reason properly, without violence and threats.... To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm, or weapons, or any other means of threatening a person with death.

Muslim anger has concentrated on the first words of the papal citation, about Muhammad's essential inhumanity. In response to this anger, the papal palace duly announced that His Holiness's respect for Islam as a religion remains undiminished. Vatican spokesmen insisted that the offending line was incidental to the pope's broader message, and that he was not endorsing the medieval emperor's views, but simply quoting a historical text to make a historical point. In his extraordinary expression of regret on September 17, the pope himself adopted this position, declaring that "these were in fact quotations from a medieval text, which do not in any way express my personal thought." "The true meaning of my address in its totality," Benedict continued, "was and is an invitation to frank and sincere dialogue, with great mutual respect." Many in the First World will be inclined to accept the pope's clarification. Though few of them will say it openly (except perhaps Silvio Berlusconi), the violence following Benedict's comment will only confirm for them the legitimacy of his portrait of Islam. Hasyim Muzadi, the head of Indonesia's largest Muslim organization, was right to warn his coreligionists that a violent response to Benedict's words would only have the effect of vindicating them.

Still, we need to ask why, if the medieval text is so incidental to Benedict's argument and he does not endorse its meaning, he cited it at all. It was certainly not owing to the text's originality. The emperor's attack on Muhammad as a prophet of violence is among the oldest of Christian complaints (we might even say stereotypes) about Islam and its founder. Already during Islam's early conquests in the seventh century, Christians were suggesting that its spread by the sword was sufficient proof that Muhammad was a false prophet. Of course we cannot blame medieval Christians conquered by Islam for characterizing it as a violent religion, any more than we can blame medieval Muslims for later failing to appreciate the claims of Christian crusaders that their breaking of Muslim heads was an act of love. The history of the alliance of monotheism with physical force is both venerable and ecumenical. The question is, why in our troubled times did Benedict choose to bring the world's attention to the unoriginal words of this Byzantine emperor?

One answer is that Turkey has long been on the pontiff's mind. Readers may recall then–Cardinal Ratzinger's interview with *Le Figaro* in 2004 in which he commented that Turkey should not be admitted to the European Union "on the grounds that it is a Muslim nation" and historically has always been contrary to Europe. Like Ratzinger, Manuel II Paleologus also worried about keeping the Turks out of Europe. As the antepenultimate emperor of Byzantium and the last effective one (he ruled from 1391 to 1425; Byzantium fell in 1453), he spent his life fighting—sometimes in the Muslim armies, but mostly against them—in the final great effort to keep Constanti-

David Nirenberg is a historian and professor in the Committee on Social Thought at the University of Chicago, and the author of Communities of Violence: Persecution of Minorities in the Middle Ages *(Princeton University Press).*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

nople from becoming Istanbul. He traveled across Europe as far as London in a vain attempt to awaken the Latin West to the growing threat to European Christendom in the East. And he wrote letters and treatises (such as his *Dialogue With a Muslim*) against Islam, rehearsing for his beleaguered subjects all the arguments against the religion of their enemies. For all these reasons, history remembers the emperor Manuel as an exemplary defender of Christian Europe against Islam. In 2003, in fact, there appeared a German translation of *Dialogue With a Muslim*, and the book's editor states in his preface that the work is being published in order to remind today's readers of the dangers that Turkey poses to the European Union. The pope may have been making a similar point.

The emperor may serve the pope as a historical allegory, but the specific meaning of his words is useful as well. It is true that Manuel's sentence about Muhammad's inhumanity is incidental to Benedict's arguments. It was doubtless included for the simple reason that it opened the portion of the text that Benedict wanted to use. (Fortunately, he did not quote the preceding paragraphs of Manuel's treatise, which present Muhammad's teachings as plagiarisms and perversions of Jewish law.) But the medieval emperor's claim that Islam is not a rational religion—"To convince a reasonable soul, one does not need a strong arm"—lies at the heart of the pope's lecture, and of his vision of the world. That vision should be a disturbing one, not only for Muslims but for adherents of other religions as well.

In order to understand why, we need to unpack the pope's learned thesis, which will be immediately intelligible to connoisseurs of German academic theology and to almost no one else. (The pope's website promises that footnotes are forthcoming.) Simply put, the theological argument is this: Catholic Christianity is the only successful blend of "Jewish" obedience to God (faith) with Greek philosophy (reason). This marriage of faith and reason, body and spirit, is what Benedict, following a long Christian tradition, calls the "logos," the "word of God."

The pope chose to make his point about the special greatness of his own faith through the negative example of Islam, which he claims has not achieved the necessary synthesis. Like Judaism, Islam in his view has always been too concerned with absolute submission to God's law, neglecting reason. It was to make this point that Benedict invoked his reading of Manuel II Paleologus, which he supplemented with an allusion to the claim by Ibn Hazm (systematically misspelled by the Vatican as Hazn) that an omnipotent God is not bound by reason. Like Manuel, Ibn Hazm (994–1064) is an interesting authority for Benedict to have chosen. He, too, lived through the collapse of his civilization, in his case the Muslim Caliphate of Cordoba. He, too, produced a defense of his faith against its rising foes, though his took the form not of a dialogue but of a massive history of religions, charting the eternal struggle of the godly against the evils of Judaism and Christianity. This view of history, together with his adherence to a Zahiri sect of Islam that emphasized obedience to the literal meaning of the Koran, have led some contemporary commentators to see in Ibn Hazm a precursor to modern Islamism. He thus serves the pope particularly well as an example, but he can scarcely be called representative of medieval Islam.

COURTESY BIBLIOTHÈQUE NATIONALE

***Manuel II Paleologus*, 1409-1411**

The role of Islam in Benedict's argument is important, but it is worth noting that it is not the only religion the pope finds deficient in reason. Even within Christianity, the marriage of faith and reason has often been strained by attempts at what Benedict calls "de-Hellenization," or de-Greeking. Luther's move toward faith, for example, occasioned his attack on the Catholic philosophical movement known as Scholasticism. This meant that much of Protestant Christianity became unbalanced, inclining too far away from "Greek" reason and toward "Jewish" faith, while the Catholic Church strove to safeguard the proper balance. And of course there have been movements inclining too far in the opposite direction, the most important of these being the triumphant "scientific" or "practical" reason of modernity.

All these systems of thought fail to make sense of man's place in the world insofar as they fail to achieve the necessary balance between faith and reason. That balance, Benedict explains, was born in the New Testament, which "bears the imprint of the Greek spirit, which had already come to maturity as the Old Testament developed." It was disseminated and preserved over the centuries through the Catholic Church in western Europe. Indeed, for Benedict, the "inner rapprochement between Biblical faith and Greek philosophical inquiry" is really a European phenomenon: "Christianity, despite its origins and some significant developments in the East, finally took on its historically decisive character in Europe. We can also express this the other way around: this convergence ... created Europe and remains the foundation of what can rightly be called Europe." The pope concedes that not all aspects of the Christian synthesis, brokered in the particular culture of Greco-Roman Palestine and consummated in

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

The sequel to the best-selling *Culture Matters*

"I can think of no better entrance to the topic, both for what it teaches and the way it invites and prepares the reader to continue. A gateway study."

—DAVID S. LANDES, author of *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations*

"Harrison takes up the question that is at the center of politics today:
Can we self-consciously change cultures so they encourage development and modernization?"

—DAVID BROOKS, *New York Times*

"An impressive, persuasive, and indispensable book for anyone interested in improving the conditions of human life in poor countries."

—SAMUEL HUNTINGTON, author of *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*

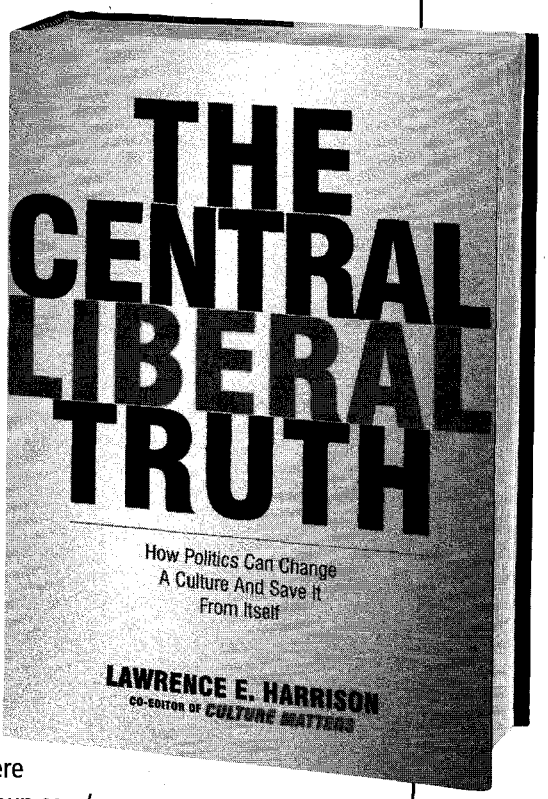
"A book of enormous importance and startling originality. Harrison has pulled off an amazing intellectual feat."

—FOUAD AJAMI, School of Advanced International Studies

Lawrence E. Harrison

"Larry Harrison takes culture seriously, but shows that culture evolves, and offers a practical agenda for cultural change."

—FRANCIS FUKUYAMA, author of *Nation-Building: Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*


THE CENTRAL LIBERAL TRUTH
How Politics Can Change A Culture And Save It From Itself
LAWRENCE E. HARRISON
CO-EDITOR OF CULTURE MATTERS

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

At bookstores everywhere
Visit us online at www.oup.com/us

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

that of Catholic Europe, need to be "integrated into all cultures." But the marriage of faith and reason does, for it is now universal, fundamental to "the nature of faith itself."

IN SUM, THE POPE'S ESSAY IS A DECLARATION of the ongoing and universal truth of Catholic dogma: exactly what we should expect from the vicar of St. Peter. What we should not do, however, is confuse this declaration for an adequate description of Islam, medieval or modern. Any Islamic historian, any historian of religion, could easily object that Benedict has his history wrong. It is easy to show that Islam, too, was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy: indeed, the Catholic West would not have known much of that philosophy without the Islamic transmission of the ancient texts in Arabic translation. Aquinas learned his Aristotle from Muslim philosophers such as Averroës and Avicenna (as did Maimonides). And what kind of historian, what kind of serious intellectual, pretends to characterize a religion as vast and diverse as Islam with a single quotation from an embattled medieval Christian polemicizing against it? Insofar as the pope's job description is not that of historian but defender of the Catholic faith, such objections are to some extent beside the point. Still, we might have hoped for more from a learned leader at a time when the Western world is desperately in need of greater knowledge about Islam and its history.

There is another problem. Benedict's plea for Hellenization draws on a German philosophical tradition—stretching from Hegel's *The Spirit of Christianity* through Weber's sociology of religions to the post–World War II writings of Heidegger—whose confrontations of Hebraism with Hellenism contributed to, rather than prevented, violence against non-Christians on a scale unheard of in the Muslim world. We may grant that such an intellectual dependence is hard to avoid, given the deep and abiding influence of this theological and philosophical tradition on the modern humanities and social sciences. From a Eurocentric point of view, we might even concede the pope's well-worn claim that, as Heine put it in 1841, the "harmonious fusion of the two elements," the Hebraic and the Hellenic, was "the task of all European civilization."

What we cannot accept without contradiction or hypocrisy is the pope's presentation of the speech as an invitation to dialogue. It is true that the talk concludes with an invitation: "It is to this great logos, to this breadth of reason, that we invite our partners in the dialogue of cultures." But it also concludes with the claim that "only through [rationality of faith] do we become capable of that genuine dialogue of cultures and religions so urgently needed today." The bulk of "Faith, Reason, and the University" is explicitly dedicated to the thesis that European Catholicism has effectively mixed faith and reason in the logos, and that other religions, specifically Islam, have not. Forget for a moment the historical inaccuracies (not just about Islam, but about other religions as well) in such a statement, and focus only on the logic. What kind of invitation begins by denying its guests the qualifications for attendance at the party? The pope's "invitation" at Regensburg was not to a "dialogue of cultures" at all. What he was advocating was a kind of conversion, or at least a convergence of all religions and cultures toward a logos that is explicitly characterized as Catholic and European.

Just like Manuel's medieval "dialogos" with a Muslim (the Greek title of the emperor's treatise means "controversy" or "debate" rather than "dialogue" in our modern sense), Benedict's lecture was a polemic posing as a dialogue. Some among the faithful will rejoice that Benedict, once known as "the Rottweiler" for his dogged defense of doctrine as a cardinal, has bared his teeth as pope. But his speech must not be mistaken for something more noble or more ecumenical than the articulation of Catholic dogma that it was, even if the extreme response in certain quarters of the Muslim world casts it in a more sympathetic light. There are no champions of dialogue in this story. In the harsh universe of religious polemic, there rarely are. ■

Steven Pinker
Block That Metaphor!

WHOSE FREEDOM?
THE BATTLE OVER AMERICA'S MOST IMPORTANT IDEA
By George Lakoff
(Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 277 pp., $23)

I.

THE FIELD OF LINGUISTICS has exported a number of big ideas to the world. They include the evolution of languages as an inspiration to Darwin for the evolution of species; the analysis of contrasting sounds as an inspiration for structuralism in literary theory and anthropology; the Whorfian hypothesis that language shapes thought; and Chomsky's theory of deep structure and universal grammar. Even by these standards, George Lakoff's theory of conceptual metaphor is a lollapalooza. If Lakoff is right, his theory can do everything from overturning millennia of misguided thinking in the Western intellectual tradition to putting a Democrat in the White House.

Lakoff is a distinguished linguist at Berkeley who trained with Chomsky in the 1960s, but broke with him to found first the school of generative semantics and then the school of cognitive linguistics, each of which tries in its way to explain language as a reflection of human thought processes rather than as an autonomous module of syntactic rules. Recently he has been cast as a savior of the Democratic Party in the wake of its shocking defeat in the 2004 election. He has conferred with the Democrats' leaders and strategists and addressed their caucuses, and his book *Don't Think of an Elephant!* has become a liberal talisman. *Whose Freedom?* is the latest installment of the linguist's efforts as campaign consultant. It is a reply to conservatives' repeated invocation of "freedom" to justify their agenda. It, too, is influencing prominent Democrats, to judge from its endorsements by Tom Daschle and Robert Reich.

Steven Pinker is Johnstone Professor at Harvard University. His latest book, THE STUFF OF THOUGHT: LANGUAGE AS A WINDOW INTO HUMAN NATURE, *will be published by Viking next year.*

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Lakoff's theory begins with his analysis of metaphor in everyday language, first presented in 1980 in a brilliant little book written with Mark Johnson called *Metaphors We Live By*. When we say "I shot down his argument," or "He couldn't defend his position," or "She attacked my theory," we are alluding to an unstated metaphor that argument is war. Similarly, to say "Our marriage is at a crossroads," or "We've come a long way together," or "He decided to bail out of the relationship" is to assume metaphorically that love is a journey. These metaphors are never stated in so many words, but they saturate our language and spin off variations that people easily understand (such as "We need to step on the brakes"). In each case, people must grasp a deep equivalence between the abstract idea and the concrete experience. Lakoff insists, not unreasonably, that this is an important clue to our cognitive makeup.

But this isn't the half of it. Conceptual metaphor, according to Lakoff, shows that all thought is based on unconscious physical metaphors, with beliefs determined by the metaphors in which ideas are framed. Cognitive science has also shown that thinking depends on emotion, and that a person's rationality is bounded by limitations of attention and memory. Together these discoveries undermine, in Lakoff's view, the Western ideal of conscious, universal, and dispassionate reason based on logic, facts, and a fit to reality. Philosophy, then, is not an extended debate about knowledge and ethics, it is a succession of metaphors: Descartes's philosophy is based on the metaphor "knowing is seeing," Locke's on "the mind is a container," Kant's on "morality is a strict father." And political ideologies, too, cannot be understood in terms of assumptions or values, but only as rival versions of the metaphor "society is a family." The political right likens society to a family ruled by authoritarian parenting, whereas the political left prefers a family cared for with nurturant parenting.

Political debates, according to Lakoff, are contests between metaphors. Citizens are not rational and pay no attention to facts, except as they fit into frames that are "fixed in the neural structures of their brains" by sheer repetition. In George W. Bush's first term, for example, the president promised tax "relief," which frames taxes as an affliction, the reliever as a hero, and anyone obstructing him as a villain. The Democrats were foolish to offer their own version of tax relief, which accepted the Republicans' framing; it was like asking people not to think of an elephant. Instead, they should have re-framed taxes as "membership fees" necessary to maintain the services and infrastructure of the society to which they belong. Likewise, the lawyers who are said to press "frivolous lawsuits" should be reframed as "public protection attorneys," and "activist judges" who "legislate from the bench" rebranded as "freedom judges."

And now, in his new book, Lakoff takes on the concept of freedom, which was mentioned forty-nine times in Bush's last inaugural address. American conservatism, he says, appeals to a notion of freedom rooted in strict-father morality—but this is a hijacking of the traditional American concept, which is based on progressive values of nurturance and empathy. The left and the right are also divided by another cognitive style: conservatives think in terms of direct causation, where a person's actions have an immediate billiard-ball effect (people get fat because they lack self-control), while progressives think in terms of systemic causation, in which effects fall out of complex social, ecological, and economic systems (people are fat because of an economic system that allows the food industry to lobby against government regulation).

THERE IS MUCH TO ADMIRE IN Lakoff's work in linguistics, but *Whose Freedom?*, and more generally his thinking about politics, is a train wreck. Though it contains messianic claims about everything from epistemology to political tactics, the book has no footnotes or references (just a generic reading list), and cites no studies from political science or economics, and barely mentions linguistics. Its use of cognitive neuroscience goes way beyond any consensus within that field, and its analysis of political ideologies is skewed by the author's own politics and limited by his disregard of centuries of prior thinking on the subject. And Lakoff's cartoonish depiction of progressives as saintly sophisticates and conservatives as evil morons fails on both intellectual and tactical grounds.

Let us begin with the cognitive science. As many of Lakoff's skeptical colleagues have noted, the ubiquity of metaphor in language does *not* imply that all thinking is concrete. People cannot use a metaphor to reason with unless they have a deeper grasp of which aspects of the metaphor should be taken seriously and which should be ignored. When reasoning about a relationship as a kind of journey, it is fine to mull over the counterpart to a common destination, or to the bumpy stretches along the way—but someone would be seriously deranged if he wondered whether he had time to pack, or whether the next gas station has clean restrooms. Thinking cannot trade in metaphors directly. It must use a more basic currency that captures the abstract concepts shared by the metaphor and its topic—progress toward a shared goal in the case of journeys and relationships, conflict in the case of argument and war—while sloughing off the irrelevant bits.

Also, most metaphors are not processed as metaphors as all. They may have been alive in the minds of the original coiners, who needed some sound to express a new concept (such as "attack" for aggressive criticism). But subsequent speakers may have kicked the ladder away and memorized the idiom by rote. That is why we hear so many dead metaphors such as "coming to a head" (which most people would avoid if they knew that it alludes to the buildup of pus in a pimple), mixed metaphors ("once you open a can of worms, they always come home to roost"), Goldwynisms ("a verbal agreement isn't worth the paper it's written on"), and figurative uses of "literally," as in Baruch Korff's defense of Nixon during his Watergate ordeal: "The American press has literally emasculated the president." Laboratory experiments have confirmed that people don't think about the underlying image when understanding a familiar metaphor, only when they are faced with a new one.

LAKOFF'S WAY WITH BRAIN SCIence is even more dubious. It is true that "the frames that define common sense are instantiated physically in the brain," but only in the sense that every thought we think—permanent or transient, rational or irrational—is instantiated physically in the brain. The implication that frames, by being "physically fixed" in the brain, are especially insidious or hard to change, is gratuitous. Also, cognitive psychology has not shown that people absorb frames through sheer repetition. On the contrary, information is retained when it fits into a person's greater understanding of

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

the subject matter. Nor is the claim that people are locked into a single frame anywhere to be found in cognitive linguistics, which emphasizes that people can nimbly switch among the many framings made available by their language. When Becky shouts across a room to Liz, an onlooker can construe the event as affecting Liz, creating a message, making noise, sending a message across the room, or just Becky moving her muscles in a certain way.

The upshot is that people can evaluate their metaphors. In everyday conversation they can call attention to them, such as the deconstruction of the "time is space" metaphor in the African American snap "Your mama's so dumb, she put a ruler on the side of the bed to see how long she slept." And in science, practitioners scrutinize and debate whether a given metaphor (heat as fluid, atom as solar system, gene as coded message) accurately captures the causal structure of the world, and if so, in which ways.

Finally, even if the intelligence of a single person can be buffeted by framing and other bounds on rationality, this does not mean that we cannot hope for something better from the fruits of many people thinking together—that is, from the collective intelligence in institutions such as history, journalism, and science, which have been explicitly designed to overcome those limitations through open debate and the testing of hypotheses with data. All this belies Lakoff's cognitive relativism, in which mathematics, science, and philosophy are beauty contests between rival frames rather than attempts to characterize the nature of reality.

It undermines his tips in the political arena as well. Lakoff tells progressives not to engage conservatives on their own terms, not to present facts or appeal to the truth, and not to pay attention to polls. Instead they should try to pound new frames and metaphors into voters' brains. Don't worry that this is just spin or propaganda, he writes: it is part of the "higher rationality" that cognitive science is substituting for the old-fashioned kind based on universal disembodied reason.

But Lakoff's advice doesn't pass the giggle test. One can imagine the howls of ridicule if a politician took Lakoff's Orwellian advice to rebrand taxes as "membership fees." Surely no one has to hear the metaphor "tax relief" to think of taxes as an affliction; that sentiment has been around as long as taxes have been around. (Even Canadians, who tolerate a far more expansive government, grumble about their taxes.) Also, "taxes" and "membership fees" are not just two ways of framing the same thing. If you choose not to pay a membership fee, the organization will stop providing you with its services. But if you choose not to pay taxes, men with guns will put you in jail. And even if taxes were like membership fees, aren't lower membership fees better than higher ones, all else being equal? Why should anyone feel the need to defend the very idea of an income tax? Other than the Ayn Randian fringe, has anyone recently proposed abolishing it?

In defending his voters-are-idiots theory, Lakoff has written that people do not realize that they are really better off with higher taxes, because any savings from a federal tax cut would be offset by increases in local taxes and private services. But if that is a fact, it would have to be demonstrated to a bureaucracy-jaded populace the old-fashioned way, as an argument backed with numbers. And that is the kind of wonkish analysis that Lakoff dismisses.

Now let us consider the metaphor "a nation is a family." Recall that in Lakoff's account, conservatives think of a strict father and progressives think of a nurturant ... well, here Lakoff runs into a wee problem. The metaphors in our language imply that the nurturing parent should be a mother, beginning with "nurture" itself, which comes from the same root as "to nurse." Just think of the difference in meaning between "to mother a child" and "to father a child"! The value that we sanctify next to apple pie is motherhood, not parenthood, and dictionaries list "caring" as one of the senses of "maternal" but not of "parental," to say nothing of "paternalistic," which means something else altogether. But it would be embarrassing if progressivism seemed to endorse the stereotype that women are more suited to nurturing children than men are, even if that is, by Lakoff's own logic, a "metaphor we live by." So political correctness trumps linguistics, and the counterpart to the strict father is an androgynous "nurturant parent."

Lakoff's theory is aimed at explaining a genuine puzzle: why the various positions clustering in left-wing and right-wing ideologies are found together. If someone is in favor of laissez-faire economics, it's a good bet the person will also favor judicial restraint, tough criminal punishment, and a strong military, and be opposed to expansive welfare programs, sexual permissiveness, and shocking art. Conversely, if someone is an environmental activist, it is likely that he or she will favor abortion rights, homosexual marriage, and soak-the-rich taxes. At first glance these positions would seem to have nothing in common. Lakoff argues that the two clusters fall out of the competing metaphors for the family, with the strict father demanding personal responsibility of his wayward children and punishing them when they misbehave, and the nurturant parent showing empathy and emphasizing interdependence.

Lakoff does not mention that others have pondered this question before him, going back at least to Hobbes, Rousseau, Burke, and Godwin. The standard contemporary analysis sees the political right as having a tragic vision in which human nature is permanently afflicted by limitations of knowledge, wisdom, and virtue, and the political left as having a utopian vision in which human nature is naturally innocent, but corrupted by defective social institutions and perfectible by reformed ones. The right therefore has an affinity for market economies, because people will always be more motivated to work for themselves and their families than for something called "society," and because no planner has the wisdom, information, and disinterest to run an economy from the top down. A tough defense and criminal justice system are needed because people will eternally be tempted to take what they want by force, so only the prospect of sure punishment makes conquest and crime unprofitable. And since we are always teetering on the brink of barbarism, social traditions in a functioning society should be respected as time-tested workarounds for the shortcomings of an unchanging human nature, as applicable today as when they developed, even if no one can explain their rationale.

The left, by contrast, is more likely to embrace George Bernard Shaw's (and later Robert Kennedy's) credo, "Some people see things as they are and ask 'why?', I dream things that never were and ask 'why not?' " Psychological limitations are artifacts that come from our social arrangements, which should be scrutinized, morally judged, and constantly improved. Economies, social systems, and international relations should be consciously designed to bring about desirable outcomes.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

This Enlightenment-inspired framing has a natural counterpart in Lakoff's nation-as-family metaphor, because different parenting styles follow from the assumption that children are noble savages and the assumption that they are nasty, brutish, and short. Every thoughtful parent struggles to balance discipline and compassion, and one can imagine how a dialectic between these extremes might be the mental model behind right-left debates on welfare, crime, and sexuality. It is less clear how the metaphor would handle economics, since family members do not transact business with one another, or defense, since other than the Hatfields and McCoys most families do not wage war against other families. And it cannot be reconciled with the concept of a democracy, in which citizens consent to be governed by representatives rather than being the infantilized dependents of their parents. But at least it is conceivable that a discipline-compassion dimension could shed light on our political psychology.

In any case, this is not the conceptual analysis that Lakoff provides. His nurturant parent marks out not the indulgent pole of the continuum but the ideal balancing point, setting "fair but reasonable limits" and being "authoritative without being authoritarian." His strict father, on the other hand, lives by Lewis Carroll's advice: "Speak roughly to your little boy, and beat him when he sneezes." According to Lakoff, the ideal parent in the conservative worldview loves and cares only for those of his children "who measure up," and believes that "affection is important, either as a reward for obedience or to prevent alienation through a show of love despite painful punishment." Lakoff provides no evidence from linguistics or from surveys to show that this ludicrous ogre is the prototype of fatherhood in any common American conception of the family.

THIS PUT-UP JOB IS TYPICAL OF Lakoff's book. While he ostensibly offers a scholarly analysis of political thought, Lakoff cannot stop himself from drawing horns on the conservative portrait and a halo on the progressive one. Nowhere is this more egregious than in his claim that conservatives think in terms of direct rather than systemic causation. Lakoff seems unaware that conservatives have been making exactly this accusation against progressives for centuries.

Laissez-faire economics, from Adam Smith to contemporary libertarians, is explicitly motivated by the systemic benefits of the market (remember the metaphor of the "invisible hand"?). Lakoff strikingly misunderstands his enemies here, repeatedly attributing to them the belief that capitalism is a system of moral reckoning designed to reward the industrious with prosperity and to punish the indolent with poverty. In fact, the theory behind free markets is that prices are a form of information about supply and demand that can be rapidly propagated through a huge decentralized network of buyers and sellers, giving rise to a distributed intelligence that allocates resources more efficiently than any central planner could hope to do. Whatever distribution of wealth results is an unplanned by-product, and in some conceptions is not appropriate for moralization one way or another. It is emphatically not, as Lakoff supposes (in a direct-causation mentality of his own), a moral system for doling out just deserts.

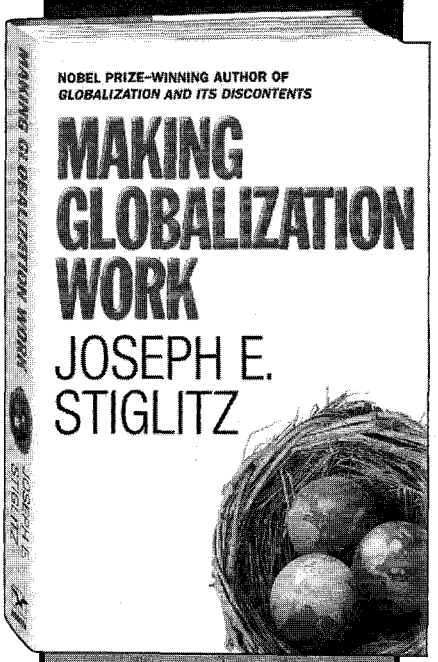
Likewise, cultural conservatives, from Burke to our own day, play up the systemic benefits of cultural traditions in bestowing unspoken standards of stability and decency on our social life. The "broken windows" theory of crime reduction is an obvious contemporary example. And both kinds of conservatives gleefully point to the direct remedies for social problems favored by progressives ("war on poverty" programs, strict emission limits to fix pollution, busing to negate educational inequality) and call attention to their unanticipated systemic consequences, such as perverse incentives and self-perpetuating bureaucratic fiefdoms. Now, none of this means that the conservative positions are unassailable. But it takes considerable ignorance, indeed chutzpah, for Lakoff to boast that only a progressive such as himself can even understand the difference between systemic and direct causation.

IN EXAMINING THE CONCEPT OF freedom itself, Lakoff again makes little use of previous analyses. Freedom comes in two flavors. Negative freedom ("freedom from") is the right of people to act as they please without being coerced by others. It obviously must be subject to the limitation that "your freedom to swing your fist ends where my nose begins." Just as obviously, freedom sometimes must be traded off against other social goods, such as economic

In his bestselling *Globalization and Its Discontents*, Nobel Prize–winning economist

JOSEPH E. STIGLITZ

delivered a penetrating analysis of the problems of globalization.



Now, he's provided a solution.

A bold, imaginative, and practical vision for an equitable world.

Stiglitz, with his "almost unmatched list of accomplishments, [possesses] a rare mix of *academic achievement* and policy experience.... His passion and directness are a breath of fresh air."

—Michael J. Mandel, *BusinessWeek*

NORTON
Independent publishers since 1923
www.wwnorton.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

equality, since even in a perfectly fair and free society, some people may end up richer than others through talent, effort, or luck.

Positive freedom ("freedom to") is the right of people to the conditions that enable them to act as they please, such as food, health, and education. The concept is far more problematic than negative freedom, because human wants are infinite, and because many of these wants can be satisfied only through the efforts of other humans. The idea that people have a right to paid vacations, central heating, and a college education would have been unthinkable throughout most of human history. (And what about air-conditioning, or orthodontics, or high-speed Internet access?) Also, my freedom to have my teeth fixed impinges on my dentist's freedom to sit at home and read the paper. For this reason, positive freedom requires an agreed-upon floor for the worst-off in a society with a given level of affluence, and presupposes an economic arrangement that gives providers an incentive to benefit recipients without being forced to do so at gunpoint. That is why many political thinkers (most notably Isaiah Berlin) have been suspicious of the very idea.

Since freedom must be traded off against other social goods (such as economic equality and social cohesion), political systems can be lined up according to where they locate the best compromise, ranging from anarchism to libertarianism to socialism to totalitarianism. For better or worse, American political sentiments tend to veer in the libertarian direction compared with other modern democracies. The tilt goes back to the Founders, who were obsessed with limiting governmental power but not terribly mindful of what happens to those who end up in the lower social and economic strata.

THIS BRINGS US TO BUSH'S invocation of freedom. I suspect it is futile to find a common ideology underlying the president's coalition of Christian fundamentalists, cultural conservatives, foreign interventionists, and economic libertarians, just as it would be to find the common denominator of the two Georges—McGovern and Wallace—in the Democratic Party of the 1960s and early 1970s. And there is no small irony in casting Dubya as a rigorous philosopher and a wizard with language. Still, there are discernible themes in his rhetoric of freedom.

Bush has capitalized on the concept of freedom in two ways. He has preserved the perception that Republicans are more economically libertarian than Democrats, and he has waged war against a foreign movement with an unmistakable totalitarian ideology. This still leaves his opponents with plenty of ammunition, such as his hypocritical protectionism and expansion of government, and his delusion that liberal democracy can be easily imposed on Arab societies. But his invocation of "freedom" has a semblance of coherence, and, like it or not, it resonates with many voters.

The same cannot be said for Lakoff's conception. "What I am calling progressive freedom," he writes, "is simply freedom in the American tradition—the understanding of freedom that I grew up with and have always loved about my country." Such an equation fails to acknowledge the possibility that Lakoff's preferences and the American tradition may not be the same thing. His understanding is pure positive freedom, while acknowledging none of its problems. It consists of appending the words "freedom to" in front of every item in a Berkeley-leftist wish list: freedom to live in a country with affirmative action, "ethical businesses," speech codes, not too many rich people, and pay in proportion to contributions to society. The list runs from the very specific—the freedom to eat "food that is pesticide free, hormone free, antibiotic free, free of genetically modified ingredients, healthy, and uncontaminated," to the very general, namely "the freedom to live in a country and a community governed by the traditional progressive values of empathy and responsibility."

"You give me a progressive issue," Lakoff boasts, "and I'll tell you how it comes down to a matter of freedom"—oblivious to the fact that he has just gutted the concept of freedom of all content. Actually, the damage is worse than that, because many of Lakoff's "freedoms" are demands that society conform to his personal vision of the good (right down to the ingredients of food), and thus are barely distinguishable from totalitarianism. How would he implement "pay in proportion to contributions to society through work"? Will a commissar decide that an opera singer deserves higher pay than a country singer, or that a seller of pork rinds should earn less than a seller of tiramisu? And his freedom not to be harmed by "hurtful language" is merely another name for the unlimited censorship of political speech. No doubt slaveholders found the speech of abolitionists to be "hurtful."

PROBABLY NOT SINCE *THE Greening of America* has there been a manifesto with as much faith that the country's problems can be solved by the purity of the moral vision of the 1960s. *Whose Freedom?* shows no trace of the empirical lessons of the past three decades, such as the economic and humanitarian disaster of massively planned economies, or the impending failure of social insurance programs that ignore demographic arithmetic. Lakoff is contemptuous of the idea that social policy requires thinking in terms of trade-offs. His policy on terrorism is that "we do not defend our freedoms by giving up our freedoms." His response to pollution is to endorse the statement that "you are not morally free to pollute." One doesn't have to be a Republican to see this as jejune nonsense. Most of us are happy to give up our freedom to carry box cutters on airplanes, and as the progressive economist Robert Frank has put it (alluding to the costs of cleanups), "there is an optimal amount of pollution in the environment, just as there is an optimal amount of dirt in your house."

What about the conservative conception of freedom? Here Snidely Whiplash pauses long enough from beating his children to explain it to us. As transmitted by Lakoff, the conservative conception includes "the freedom to hunt—regardless of whether I am hunting an endangered species." It acknowledges the need for "a free press, because business depends on many kinds of accurate information." Religious freedom implies "the freedom ... to put the Ten Commandments in every courthouse." Conservatives get their morality from strict obedience to their Protestant ministers, and this morality includes the belief that "pursuing self-interest *is* being moral," that abortion should be illegal because

Class Action

Give The New Republic to your favorite student. Subscribe at www.tnr.com/gift

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

a woman pregnant out of wedlock has acted immorally and should be punished by having to bear the child, and that everyone "who is poor just hasn't had the discipline to use the free market to become prosperous," including "people impoverished by disaster, who, if they had been disciplined enough, would be okay and who have only themselves to blame if they're not."

The problem is that the misrepresentations are harmful both intellectually and tactically, and will backfire with all of this book's potential audiences. Any of Lakoff's allies on the left who think that their opponents are the imbeciles whom he describes will have their clocks cleaned in their first debate with a Young Republican. Lakoff's book will be red meat for his foes on the right, who can hold up his distortions as proof of liberals' insularity and incomprehension. And the people in the center, the ones he really wants to reach, will be turned off by his relentless self-congratulation, his unconcealed condescension, and his shameless caricaturing of beliefs with which they might have a modicum of sympathy.

Worst of all, by delineating such a narrow ideological province as "progressivism," Lakoff is ceding vast swaths of territory to the other side. If you think that recent history has taught us anything that requires amending orthodox '60s liberalism, if you think that free markets and free trade bring any economic benefits at all (while agreeing that they have side effects that must be mitigated), if you think that democratic governance requires finding optimal tradeoffs in dilemmas such as pollution, terrorism, crime, taxes, and welfare, then you are a "conservative." It is surprising that Lakoff is not a hero to more Republicans.

There is no shortage of things to criticize in the current administration. Corrupt, mendacious, incompetent, autocratic, reckless, hostile to science, and pathologically shortsighted, the Bush government has disenchanted even many conservatives. But it is not clear what is to be gained by analyzing these vices as the desired outcome of some coherent political philosophy, especially if it entails the implausible buffoon sketched by Lakoff. Nor does it seem profitable for the Democrats to brand themselves as the party that loves lawyers, taxes, and government regulation on principle, and that does not believe in free markets or individual discipline. Lakoff's faith in the power of euphemism to make these positions palatable to American voters is not justified by current cognitive science or brain science. I would not advise any politician to abandon traditional reason and logic for Lakoff's "higher rationality."

"The latest polls have come out," the political philosopher Jay Leno said last week, "and President Bush's approval ratings have dropped another 3 percent. In fact, he's so unpopular that the Democrats are going to have to work really, really hard to screw up this election." If they take the ideas of George Lakoff seriously, they just might succeed. ■

G.W. Bowersock
The Pen and the Baton

Divas and Scholars: Performing Italian Opera
By Philip Gossett
(University of Chicago Press, 675 pp., $35)

At the end of Voltaire's tragedy about the Babylonian queen Semiramis, her son Arsace kills his own mother. The great bel canto composer Rossini later took over the story for a tragic opera, and his work also ended with the same fearful matricide. But when La Scala in Milan mounted a new production of Rossini's *Semiramide* in December 1962, the conductor Richard Bonynge coolly changed the plot to make Arsace kill the villain Assur instead, leaving his mother standing on her own solid feet at the end—ready for the applause. The Milan performance had been conceived as a showcase for Giulietta Simionato and, above all, for Bonynge's wife, Joan Sutherland. Bonynge cut and adapted the score, including altering the finale, so as to provide maximum exposure for the hugely talented soprano. He had taken care to consult Rossini's autograph in Venice, but not to defer to it. His peculiar text served "La Stupenda" for subsequent outings in *Semiramide*, notably in New York in 1964, with the incomparable Marilyn Horne, and in Boston, again with Horne, the following year.

Yet in spite of all this excitement, the decade of the 1960s was still a time in which Rossini was, as Philip Gossett observes in his fascinating book, a one-opera composer, the creator of the irresistible *Barber of Seville*. His serious pieces, beautiful works of high tragedy, were scarcely known, and although the Bonynge *Semiramide* audaciously opened up this repertoire, it is above all to Gossett that we owe the avalanche of Rossini *opera seria* that followed in subsequent decades. I was lucky enough to attend the Boston *Semiramide* and still recall the breathtaking performances of those two great singers, particularly as they negotiated a steeply raked and potentially dangerous set devised by Sarah Caldwell's ubiquitous production team.

What really opened my ears to the genius of Rossini's writing in this genre was the Rome *Zelmira* in late April 1989, when I first heard its extraordinary *duettino* accompanied only by harp and English horn. Gossett had prepared the edition for this *Zelmira* and was already on his way to becoming the leading editor of operatic scores from the first half of the nineteenth century. I felt that I was entering a new operatic world, and Gossett, a professor at the University of Chicago, was my guide. Of course, Maria Callas had almost single-handedly revived the bel canto repertoire through her exploration of Bellini masterpieces, and Bonynge was busy looking into Rossini (and much else) to find vehicles for Sutherland beyond those that fans associated with Callas. But if Bonynge investigated neglected masterpieces to prepare new roles for a great soprano, Gossett was the musicologist who entered the field determined to establish the integrity of forgotten scores and, perhaps even more importantly, the

G.W. Bowersock is professor emeritus of ancient history at the Institute for Advanced Study and an advisory director of the Metropolitan Opera.

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

performance practice that composers would have expected of singers and conductors at the time they were writing.

From the moment that Gossett moved into the field of early nineteenth-century opera, he turned up in person whenever a major house put on the great works of Rossini, Donizetti, and early Verdi. He became a pillar of the Fondazione Rossini in Pesaro, and he was a driving force in launching the new edition of the works of Verdi. Somehow he managed, through all this, to maintain decent relations with the old and powerful publishing house of Ricordi, whose editions of the old operas dominated the musical world until Gossett came along.

IN HIS ERUDITE AND DELIGHTFUL book, Gossett chronicles in detail his revolution in bringing dedicated scholarship to an operatic environment long dominated by sclerotic and autocratic traditionalists. The champions of these traditions were conductors and singers, who felt they knew best because they knew what had been done by previous generations. Audiences were much the same. They knew what they wanted to hear because they had heard it before. Not the least remarkable of Gossett's talents is his ability to work with performers on new productions, to explain the scholarly niceties without ignoring the exigencies of putting a piece across to the public. He has proved that he can do this without compromising his scholarship. He knows that Rossini, Bellini, Donizetti, and Verdi all had to contend with the harsh realities of live performance. He knows that scores could be altered to accommodate a mediocre singer or to replace an incompetent instrumentalist. But he is always searching for what the composer would have expected, and what would plausibly convey the style of a work.

Gossett's book offers detailed accounts of the interaction of scholar and performer, of research and theatrical necessity, of explicit and implicit musical direction. Although many famous artists appear in these pages and some delectable anecdotes are told, this is by no means a collection of backstage stories. It could not be more unlike the recent memoirs of the outgoing general manager of the Metropolitan Opera. It is a passionately earnest investigation of the classic problem of faithfully reconstituting a text for a modern audience. Gossett selects his examples with care to cover such sensitive issues as cuts, transposition, instrumentation, ornamentation, and libretto, and he regularly furnishes apposite musical illustrations for his points. (A reader without at least a rudimentary ability to read music will miss much of Gossett's challenging exposition.)

Bringing musical artists and scholars into confrontation is not an easy business. I have the impression that some of the more acerbic and unwelcome reactions that Gossett has received have galvanized him to write these pages. In 1975 he attempted to explain to a New York audience why he considered the Metropolitan Opera's production of a Rossinian opera called *L'Assedio di Corinto* an utterly unacceptable conflation of two different works: *Maometto II*, set to an Italian text, and *Le Siège de Corinthe*, set to a French text with an altered plot. This hybrid had been created for La Scala six years before, with Beverly Sills and Marilyn Horne under the direction of Thomas Schippers. In 1975 Sills, who was finally making her Met debut in what Gossett cattily calls "the promised land," sang her heart out to the pleasure of many fans, but Gossett's strictures on what was actually sung led her to observe tartly, "I think some so-called musicologists are like men who talk constantly of sex and never do anything about it." Gossett knew perfectly well that Sills performed brilliantly, even if, in his opinion, inappropriately; but her barbed remark clearly left a wound that he still feels.

The same can be said of Donal Henahan's assessment of the Met *Semiramide* in 1990. Reviewing, for *The New York Times*, the whole season in which it was performed, Henahan found it to have been given "in a new edition that put exhaustive scholarship before operatic effectiveness." What Gossett calls Henahan's "banal" dichotomy was nevertheless a gauntlet thrown at his feet. *Divas and Scholars* is his passionate, meticulous, candid, and devastating riposte.

For starters, the Met *Semiramide* made concessions that clearly bypassed the ears of the *Times* critic. The 1990 edition resurrected the original scoring for stage band (*banda sul palco*) in three separate numbers with twenty-two instruments. Ideally, exhaustive scholarship would have put this band back on the stage where it belonged, but the physical conditions of the Met did not allow the necessary synchronization of pit and stage bands in the rehearsal time available, and the band parts were simply incorporated into the pit orchestra. As Gossett writes with an almost audible sigh, "Exhaustive scholarship and operatic effectiveness were both sacrificed on the altar of practical expedience."

In that same production, Samuel Ramey, whose mad scene in the role of Assur was justly admired at the time, found himself confronted in that scene with a score by Rossini that was harmonically incompatible with his sustaining a final high F for seven dazzling measures. (Rossini had written that the bass should descend to the tonic and not even reach for that high note, then let go after two measures when the harmony shifted to the dominant chord.) While allowing the high F, Gossett persuaded Ramey at least to exit properly after only two measures, before the harmony changed. But in subsequent performances Ramey, left to himself, did exactly what he wanted. He made the orchestra alter the music to provide seven measures of tonic support for his long sustained F. It is clear that Gossett felt a thrill of schadenfreude when he returned to hear Ramey try to do this later in the run: the bass's voice cracked after two bars, "leaving the orchestra to repeat the tonic chord in solitary splendor."

THE SCHOLAR'S ROLE IS NEVER merely an exhaustive exercise. It is certainly that, but also much more. The preparation of an edition of an opera is, in its nature, not much different from the honorable enterprise of establishing reliable texts for ancient authors whose work is transmitted in manuscripts. This is the academic discipline known as philology, which has a distinguished pedigree from the Renaissance onward and was even practiced by scholars in Alexandria in the days of the Ptolemies. In modern times biblical scholarship led the way, but philological methods of textual criticism soon passed to Shakespearean scholarship and to the editing of the Greek and Latin classics. Philology, as practiced by its most austere acolytes, has often been

TNR Archives
More than 90 years of news, opinion, and criticism at your fingertips. tnr.com/archives

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

perceived as the soulless enemy of beloved traditions.

The crisis that Riccardo Muti faced at La Scala in a production of Verdi's *Ernani* in 1982 is emblematic of the philological enterprise, and of the animosity it can sometimes provoke. Even though the conductor chose to use the Ricordi edition, dating from the late nineteenth century and bristling with errors, he announced that his *Ernani* would be performed without cuts, exactly as the composer wished. His claim was largely based on his recent discovery that Verdi's autograph omitted Silva's cabaletta "Infin che un brando vindice" from the finale of the first act. So he chose to cut the cabaletta, and this promptly led to accusations of "philology." At the opening performance, according to Gossett, who was there, the absence of Silva's cabaletta provoked "a cry ... from the recesses of the theater: 'La cabaletta, filologo!'"

With that cry, the close link between the editorial work of Philip Gossett on opera manuscripts and the textual criticism of such masters of the Greek and Roman classics as Richard Bentley and A.E. Housman becomes not only apparent, but also important. Sills and Henahan might complain about the interventions of a musicologist in a live performance, but nowhere outside of Italy, I suspect, would one hear an accusation of philology. It is probably not accidental that two of the greatest philologists of the twentieth century were Italians: Giorgio Pasquali and his pupil Sebastiano Timpanaro, both of whom were deeply imbued with the classical learning of nineteenth-century Germany. Timpanaro's long-admired study of the philological method of the nineteenth-century scholar Karl Lachmann, which recently appeared in a masterly English translation by Glenn Most, illuminates the depths from which that cry of *filologo* emerged.

No less a scholar than Erasmus prepared the first printed edition of the Greek New Testament, and although his work is generally regarded as one of his least successful scholarly efforts, the text that he produced became the traditional text, and in a somewhat contaminated form it constituted the "received text" that was widely diffused in Protestant churches. As Timpanaro observed, "From then on it was indeed permitted to amass variants at the foot of the page—John Mill collected more of them in his Oxford edition of 1707 than anyone else did—but every attempt to introduce modifications into the text, even if on the authority of the oldest manuscripts, encountered the theologians' fierce opposition." In short, the received text, which was as artificial as any other and equally subject to human error, was "venerated as the tradition and made a return to the ancient manuscripts seem a rash innovation." Timpanaro pointed out that this prejudice extended into classical studies, in which acceptance of the currently available vulgate was preferred to consulting the available manuscripts. In Italy, Dante scholarship was caught up in the same mindless conservatism, which lasted well into the nineteenth century. What Housman once dryly called "the application of thought to textual criticism" was a most unwelcome exercise to those who wanted familiar works to be familiar rather than accurate and reliable.

THE PROBLEM THAT PHILOLOgists of all kinds—and Gossett too—must face is that the edition of a text will inevitably never be more than an approximation of the ideal. The proliferation of manuscripts and alterations made in the course of copying them introduce various changes, such as scribal emendations in a faulty classical text or revisions in a score to accommodate the exigencies of a particular opera house. For the editor of ancient texts, the luxury of consulting an autograph does not normally exist, but as Gossett knows very well, the existence of opera autographs by no means simplifies matters. A composer can make mistakes in writing out the score, as Verdi did when he inadvertently copied a line of Manrico's aria at the end of Act III of *Il Trovatore* in the wrong place. This error, repeated in all printed editions until 1993 and included in all performances up to that date, has the authority of Verdi's own hand.

It is more difficult to discern the intention of a composer when his autograph shows changes that are clearly deliberate. The mad scene in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor* is a notorious example. Everyone knows the high-flying duet between soprano and flute, but doubts about the canonical scoring arose in 1941 when a facsimile of Donizetti's autograph revealed that the composer had originally scored the duet with a glass harmonica instead of a flute. Donizetti had used this instrument once before, in support of another distressed woman in *Il Castello di Kenilworth*. It had a distinguished pedigree as a form of musical glasses designed by Benjamin Franklin and memorably exploited by Mozart. Its unearthly music seems an inspired accompaniment for the deranged Lucia—and yet Donizetti clearly substituted a flute before opening night at the Teatro San Carlo in Naples on September 26, 1835. Is this what he really wanted? It would seem perverse to quarrel with his own rewriting in advance of the first public performance. Yet diligent research has now revealed that Donizetti had written for a particular performer, Domenico Pezzi, who had in fact rehearsed the scene with the first Lucia and full orchestra. But when Pezzi had a disagreement with the opera house earlier that year over his work in a ballet, the glass harmonica was replaced by a flute during the run of the ballet. He sued the theater, and the possibility of employing him in *Lucia* vanished in the dispute. Donizetti had no choice but to rewrite the scene with a flute.

As Gossett says, a good edition of the opera should present both scorings and leave it to the artists to choose. It seems obvious that what Donizetti really wanted was the glass harmonica, but what he finally wrote called for a flute. To pair the soprano with a flute represents both tradition and the written score, although it does not represent Donizetti's original intention. The written text is never sacrosanct. It can be no more than a pointer. Composers, like writers, were usually prepared to adjust their ideas to secure the best effect, and conductors and singers today cannot be faulted for the same instinct, though this can lead them into embarrassing confrontations with the audience.

A new generation of scrupulous conductors, including Riccardo Muti and

RESEARCH ASSOCIATE/PERSONAL ASSISTANT

New York City—Highly intelligent, resourceful individuals with exceptional communication skills sought to undertake research projects and administrative tasks for one of Wall Street's most successful entrepreneurs. We welcome applications from writers, musicians, artists, or others who may be pursuing other professional goals in the balance of their time. $90-110k/yr to start (depending on qualifications). Resume to: gen8R@spsfind.com

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Gianluigi Gelmetti, has rallied to the cause of performing a work precisely as they imagine it to have been written: *come scritto*. But this noble aim can lead to howls of protest, as with the omitted cabaletta in *Ernani* or the elimination of the high C at the end of "Di quella pira" in *Il Trovatore*. That traditional and beloved high note is absent not only from the autograph, but even from all printed editions of the opera. Yet if audiences like to hear it, why should a tenor who can reach it not deliver it? In fact, Gossett suggests that the tenor for whom Verdi wrote the role lacked a range (or tessitura) that could reach the high C, and so he devised the music accordingly. Performers and musicologists need more than a little flexibility in confronting live audiences in the real world.

Gelmetti's loyalty to the written score, as he found it, could sometimes generate major problems, as Renée Fleming learned when she took on the title role in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia* at La Scala in 1998. The opening night was one of the rare disasters in her career, and it was because she was working with a conductor who believed that he had to conduct every note exactly as written. The issue was the appoggiatura, an eighteenth-century convention that was taken over in the early nineteenth century in Italy by Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti. At a feminine verse ending, as in the word *amore*, with stress on the penultimate syllable, composers customarily wrote the same pitch for the two final syllables, but it is well known and documented that singers were expected to take the penultimate pitch up a whole step (or occasionally down) before concluding on the pitch as written. The appoggiatura, as Gossett observes repeatedly, was not an optional ornamentation. It was simply the way to sing the music, and it was what the composer expected when he penned the notes.

The hapless Gelmetti, seeing the same pitch for two notes where Donizetti clearly expected an appoggiatura, insisted that the pitch should remain the same in performance. Fleming knew better, but (as Gossett reports) "singers and conductor were working at cross-purposes, and the developing atmosphere was fraught with tension." On opening night, massive hissing and booing embarrassed the diva and led to the conductor's collapse and dispatch to the hospital. Even after he recovered, Gelmetti remained in blissful ignorance of his ignorance. In the fullness of time, Verdi, who knew the appoggiatura convention perfectly, decided to start writing the pitch-change directly into his scores, and so Gossett asked Gelmetti with heavy irony whether he thought that Verdi had invented the appoggiatura when he wrote its occurrences into the score of *Nabucco*. Gelmetti missed the point.

Tonight

In the beginning there was this surface. A wall, beginning.
Tonight it coaxed music from a Harlem cloudbank. It freestyled
a smoke from a stranger's coat; stole thinned gin.
It was on the surfaces of its beginnings, but outside
looking in. The lapse-blue facade of Harlem Hospital is weatherstill
like a starlit lake in the middle of Lenox Avenue.
I touched the tattoed surfaces of my birthplace tonight—
and because tonight is curing, the beginning let me through;
and everywhere was blurring halogen. Love the place that welcomed you.

ROWAN RICARDO PHILLIPS

KNOWING HOW TO CONSTRUE the signs in a score or a text is an essential part of any good editor's scholarly equipment. No one can rely upon the doctrine of *come scritto*, as if the truth lay in a straightforward rendering of what appears on the manuscript page. A Greek manuscript in which the letters theta and sigma appear alongside each other cannot be rendered as theta-sigma; a knowledgeable person knows that this is an abbreviation of *theos*, or "god." Manuscripts in both Greek and Latin abound with conventions, abbreviations, ligatures, and other devices that readers were expected to understand. Composers such as Rossini and Donizetti were no different, although Verdi must have recognized that the written convention was becoming increasingly unfamiliar when he opted to write out his appoggiaturas.

Of all forms of musical ornamentation, the appoggiatura is undoubtedly the most obvious and non-controversial. The extended cadenza was a more elaborate form of decoration that allowed singers exceptional liberty in elaborating the notes before them. But, as Gossett points out, there were stylistic limits on what could be done. Fortunately, these can be deduced from some precious examples of ornamentation that survive from the composer's hand, as for example a brilliant cadenza that Rossini himself wrote for Giuditta Pasta in the duet in *Tancredi*. Later in his life he wrote out other ornamentations, and the notebooks of singers of the day provide invaluable insight into the expectations of composers such as Rossini, Bellini, and Donizetti, and the practice of great artists such as Pasta.

Regrettably, toward the end of the nineteenth century an aberrant style of coloratura and variation became prevalent, to the great detriment of the works it was supposed to animate. Gossett signals this deterioration of taste by reference to a notorious edition of "Una voce poco fa," the great soprano aria from *The Barber of Seville*, by a certain Estelle Liebling. Of this edition he writes that "I still see this execrable piece of work in the hands of young singers, and I simply cannot fathom the know-nothingism that allows such a practice to continue to flourish in American conservatories." Liebling transposed the cavatina up a half-step to suit a higher voice and allow for a coloratura virtuosity more appropriate for the Queen of the Night than any Rossini heroine. By inserting cadenzas in the wrong places, Liebling disturbed the composer's symmetry of design, and with a final high F she thumbed her nose at Rossini himself, whose own tasteful version for Matilde Juva survives. To quote Gossett on the practitioners of this nonsense: " 'The audience expects it.' 'My public demands it.' 'If I don't sing it, they'll think I don't have it.' 'What would my mother say?' You name the justification, I've heard it."

Excisions from tradition are undoubtedly controversial, but so, too, are

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

additions. Near the end of the second act of *The Barber of Seville*, Rossini wrote a brilliant aria for the Count, "Cessa di più resistere," which has traditionally been omitted in modern performances. Tullio Serafin, a respected maestro of bel canto opera from a previous generation, waged a war on behalf of Ricordi against charges from a young Australian rebel named Denis Vaughan, who accused the old publishing house in 1958 of purveying scores that were crammed with mistakes. Serafin laid claim to knowledge of a continuing performance tradition, and in that context he defended the omission of the Count's number in the second act of *Barber*. He declared the aria superfluous to the action, probably an accommodation by Rossini to a tenor's request, and already omitted in the first performance. He felt that Rossini had written the piece without "complete conviction." Gossett makes mincemeat of these arguments. But for those of us who heard Juan Diego Florez sing this amazing aria at the Met in 2002, no argument is needed. It not only belongs in the opera, it has to be there.

A GOOD EDITOR HAS TO LAY OUT the options. This is as true for the texts of Sophocles and Virgil as it is for the scores of Rossini and Donizetti. Gossett understands this supremely well, owing to his direct involvement with opera productions. He strives to maintain the style and the expectations of the composer without neglecting the constraints of house and artist. In this respect he is merely re-enacting the constant accommodation to necessity that was (and still is) the daily life of anyone who writes for public presentations. The Greek tragedies have come down to us with interpolations by the actors as well as by the scribes who transmitted them. The interplay of audience engagement, artistic vision, and fidelity to the original work remains the ultimate goal of anyone who wants to mediate between scholar and impresario.

Gossett's book closes with two remarkable leaps from the archive into the orchestra pit—two productions in which he fashioned by adaptation works of Verdi and Rossini that had never existed in those forms before. The first, created for the new opera house in Gothenburg, Sweden, was a bold attempt to cut through the absurdities in current versions of Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera*. This work, which included the onstage assassination of a king, had encountered serious problems with the censors in the course of its gestation, and operagoers by now will be familiar with both the Boston and the Sweden settings of the piece. Anckarström seems an odd character in Boston, and Tom and Sam are out of place in Stockholm. The tortured history of the score impelled Gossett to put together an opera called *Gustavo III*, attending closely to the Naples version of Verdi's work called *Una Vendetta in Dominò*. Obviously the recreated opera is in no way an original or authentic work by Verdi. Gossett speaks of "the chimera of authentic performance." It is, rather, an imaginative reconstruction that affords a glimpse into the Naples masterpiece that might have been.

I wish I had heard and seen the Gothenburg *Gustavo III*, but I did at least have the good fortune to be present for a performance of Gossett's other venture into rewriting nineteenth-century opera. This was a new production of *Il Viaggio a Reims* at Helsinki in 2003, under the direction of Dario Fo. The discovery of *Viaggio* itself had been a relatively recent occurrence, with a memorable Pesaro production in 1984 after the work had been pieced together from newly found scores. They served to confirm inferences from the later *Le Comte Ory*, which had drawn from it. A glorious recording by Claudio Abbado with a stellar cast still evokes the excitement that attended the discovery of this extraordinary work. I first encountered its Gran Pezzo Concertato for fourteen voices at the Rossini bicentennial birthday gala on February 29, 1992 in New York. Among the fourteen singers on stage simultaneously for this exhilarating number were Deborah Voigt, June Anderson, Frederica Von Stade, Marilyn Horne, Chris Merritt, Rockwell Blake, Thomas Hampson, and Samuel Ramey.

Viaggio is a silly piece, and all the more wonderful because of it. It is a tale of eccentric European grandees meeting at a spa on their way to the coronation of Charles X at Rheims in 1825. They wait for their carriage, and it never comes: that is the entirety of the plot. Since the piece was written to order for that very occasion, its political context is indisputable, and for an anarchist such as Dario Fo its crazy quilt of aristocratic pomposities was irresistible. He re-imagined and rewrote the *Viaggio* text within the frame of Rossini's infectious and dazzling score. It fell to Gossett to do the musical surgery necessary to accommodate Fo's inventions. The Helsinki program book credits Gossett with the adaptation of Rossini's music to Fo's text. It was clear from the moment that the opera began that Fo wanted to have an in-your-face impact upon his audience. He brought on circus high-wire antics, magic umbrellas, hats flying through the air, and, above all, a parade of large posters with political slogans in Finnish.

By the time I saw the Helsinki performance I knew the music fairly well, and I found that it cast its spell as powerfully as ever. Gossett's alterations seemed to my ears seamless, and they allowed the piece to achieve an immediacy that was probably greater than anything experienced since 1825. Finns in the audience, who were the majority, clearly responded heartily to the frequent display of large posters. Although the texts inevitably left me in the dark, I had a visceral sense of what Dario Fo was trying to achieve, and that he had achieved it. The collaboration between the formidable professor of music and the outspoken rebellious anarchist was a miracle to witness. If Sills could have attended this *Viaggio*, I am certain that she would have revised her opinion of at least one musicologist. Philip Gossett is a superb scholar, but he is also a true man of the theater. ■

CORRESPONDENCE

continued from page 4

of several others, was part of a larger mid-to-late twentieth-century critique of the therapeutic culture that is tremendously important and worthy of further attention. Although coming at the question from a very different angle from Rieff's, Szasz's work contributed in an unforgettable fashion to our understanding of the dangers of the seemingly benign imperatives of the therapeutic age. I wrote in my essay that Rieff "helped to inaugurate" this line of inquiry—with earlier work that culminated in *Freud: The Mind of a Moralist* (1959) as well as *The Triumph of the Therapeutic*—not that he inaugurated it. His critique emerged, of course, within an intellectual milieu in which many had come to question—in manifold ways—the orthodoxies of politics and culture regnant at the time. ■

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

WASHINGTON DIARIST

Alms and The Man

WILL THE RICH SAVE the world? This has not been their traditional service to humankind; but in contemporary America you may be forgiven for believing in the messianic power of personal wealth. We are still enjoying the economicist fantasy that was inaugurated by technology in the Clinton years and consolidated by ideology in the Bush years. Could it be that the rich did not previously save the world because they were not rich enough? But they are rich enough now, right? I do not mean to be too clever. Bill Gates's transformation of the greatest fortune in history into the greatest philanthropy in history will earn him a pride of place not only in the annals of American technology but also in the annals of American morality. No, it is the Clinton Global Initiative that makes me weary of the veneration of plutocrats. I have been reading the transcripts of the event. They are peculiarly repellent, the nobility of their purpose notwithstanding.

SOME OF WHAT IS ALIENATING ABOUT these transcripts are their strictly Clintonian features. For a start, there is the cult of the personality: The former president is addressed by various speakers rather in the manner in which I imagine Enver Hoxha used to be addressed. "Bring back President Clinton," one speaker exclaimed to "[applause and cheers]." (These pages are rife with "[applause].") Nelson Mandela appeared by video feed from South Africa, but only for the purpose of introducing Bill Clinton. (In the most excruciating moment of all, Clinton recalls that he once wore Mandela's prison shirt to a party.) The Clinton Global Initiative is just a charity ball with the same guest of honor every year. Then there was the fatuity: "I thank you," Clinton told the executive director of UNICEF, "and Africa thanks you." And the banality: Religion is like a knife, Desmond Tutu taught. "If you slice a loaf of bread, it's good. And if you slice somebody's hand off, it's bad." (The former president remarked about this insight that "I will never forget [it] as long as I live.") And there was the familiar Clinton hunger for the A-list. The CGI was not only McKinsey moralized, it was also Hilton Head globalized. The former president warmly remembered that when he had trouble finding enough progressive lightbulbs for his house, he called the CEO of General Electric. The Clintons prefer the company of winners, even if they assemble the winners to talk about the losers. And to the old exclusiveness of these egalitarians there was added a new piousness, the snobbery of the saints. The best people turn out to be *the best people*. The Clintons have never recognized any difference between good people and people who help them. Even Rupert Murdoch is now a good man. If Paula Jones owned Google, a Christian reconciliation would long ago have been accomplished. And finally, of course, there was the lofty logorrhea, the sea of talk. This is an articulate lot, which is to say, they have many more words than thoughts. Recounting a meeting with the prime minister of Ethiopia about the "conversion ratio" of alternative sources of energy, Clinton told his audience: "I had this long discussion. I said, 'Well, what about cellulosic fuel?' He said, 'Well, if it's good, you get a four-to-one conversation ratio.' "

IT IS A DEADENING EXPERIENCE, THE perusal of these pages and their conversation ratios. The offense is not in the wonkery, which the problems require (and far be it from me to demur from socially responsible transactional charges to MP3 downloads); the offense is in the vanity. The only thing more vivid than the participants' interest in climate change and ethnic conflict and AIDS was their interest in themselves. "How about that Richard Branson?" "The incomparable Donna Shalala." And so on. The congratulations were all self-congratulations. Whether or not the pledges and the goals are met, there will be the after-party; the after-party of the humanitarians. The CGI transcripts offer many cautionary illustrations of the vanity of virtue. No, there is nothing wrong with charity; and yes, charitable individuals deserve recognition and gratitude. But there remains the question of the psychology of generosity, which has implications for the moral understanding of it. In Maimonides's renowned analysis of charity, the highest form of largesse is to assist the poor man "by putting him where he can dispense with other people's aid"—with a job or a business partnership. In many ways the experts and the donors at the CGI honored this ideal of self-reliance, which the philosopher says is "exceeded by none." But the next highest degree is anonymous giving. Oops. Maimonides declares that nameless and faceless contributions are "performing the meritorious deed for its own sake," and he notes that in the Temple there was a "hall of secrecy" where people would clandestinely leave their gifts for the needy. Righteousness must not be debased into an occasion for, an ornament of, celebrity. The motives of ethical action are always mixed. A good deed can also be corrupting. A blessing, then, on the CGI and its benevolent din; but it is asking for more admiration than it deserves.

ANYWAY, CHARITY IS ONLY CHARITY. I know it is rude to say so, but Bill Clinton had eight years as the most powerful man on earth to act against climate change and ethnic conflict and AIDS, and his achievements were too paltry to be explained merely by his scandals. Still, I do not wish to fix on this man and his manic search for "redemption." Enough of him. I wish only to suggest that all the philanthropy in the world cannot do the work of politics, policies, and power. There was an air of unreality about the charitocrats' deliberations in New York. It is the same air of unreality that afflicts the conservative illusion that voluntarism and the conscience of the private sector will suffice. The income inequalities in our legendarily moneyed world, however you explain them, are hideous: This is the element of truth in the neo-Marxism that is about to engulf us, and that would have engulfed us years ago in the form of the anti-globalization movement if September 11 had not changed the subject. And the politics of the present day do not seem especially aroused by these inequalities. There have been better times to be worse off. The fine meliorism of the CGI reads a lot like happy talk about tragedy. Maybe I am so sick of self-importance because I am so given to it, or maybe I am now old enough to see how stubbornly the world refuses to change, or maybe I have been watching *The Wire* too much, but if I were a poor man I would turn off the rich and the famous and look to my own and organize.

LEON WIESELTIER

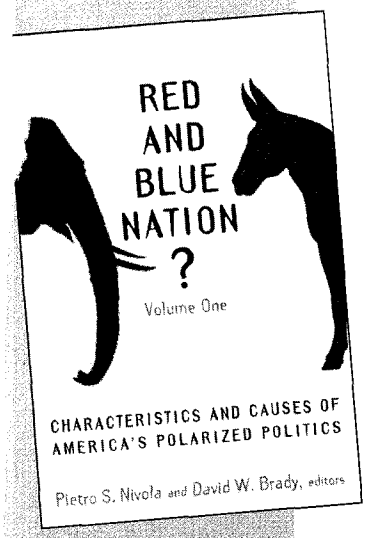
LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED

Critical Readings from Hoover Institution Fellows

Red and Blue Nation?

Characteristics and Causes of America's Polarized Politics

EDITED BY PIETRO S. NIVOLA AND DAVID W. BRADY



Analysts and pundits increasingly perceive a widening gulf between "red states" and "blue states." Yet the research to support that perception is scattered and sometimes difficult to parse. America's polarized politics, it is said, poses fundamental dangers for democratic and accountable government. Heightened partisanship is thought to degrade deliberation in Congress and threaten the integrity of other institutions, from the courts to the media. But how deep do the country's political divisions actually run? Are they truly wreaking havoc upon the social fabric? Has America become a house divided? This important new book, *Red and Blue Nation?* gets to the bottom of this perplexing issue.

The first of two volumes cosponsored by Brookings and the Hoover Institution carefully considers the extent to which polarized views among political leaders and activists are reflected in the population at large.

In *Red and Blue Nation?* leading journalists and scholars combine their different insights to enrich our understanding of the issue, offering thoughtful analyses of the underlying problems. This comprehensive and accessible discussion of the polarization debate will be an essential resource for policymakers, scholars, and anyone interested in the health of American public discourse.

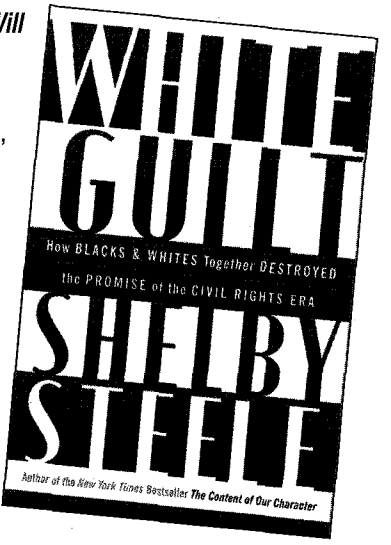
Brookings Institution Press
250 pages 0-815-76083-3 $22.95 paper
December 2006
www.brookings.edu/press
1-800-537-5487

White Guilt

How Blacks and Whites Together Destroyed the Promise of the Civil Rights Era

SHELBY STEELE

"Shelby Steele is America's clearest thinker about America's most difficult problem."
— George F. Will


WHITE
GUILT
How BLACKS & WHITES Together DESTROYED
the PROMISE of the CIVIL RIGHTS ERA
SHELBY
STEELE
Author of the New York Times Bestseller The Content of Our Character

In 1955 the murderers of Emmett Till, a black Mississippi youth, were acquitted of their crime, undoubtedly because they were white. Forty years later, O. J. Simpson, whom many thought would be found guilty of murder by virtue of the DNA evidence against him, went free after his attorney portrayed him as a victim of racism. Clearly, a sea change has taken place in American culture, but how did it happen? In this important new work, distinguished race relations scholar Shelby Steele argues that the age of white supremacy has given way to an age of white guilt—and neither that has been good for African Americans.

Shelby Steele is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

Harper Collins Publishers
192 pages 0-06-057862-9 $24.95 Hardcover
May 2006
www.harpercollins.com
212-207-7000

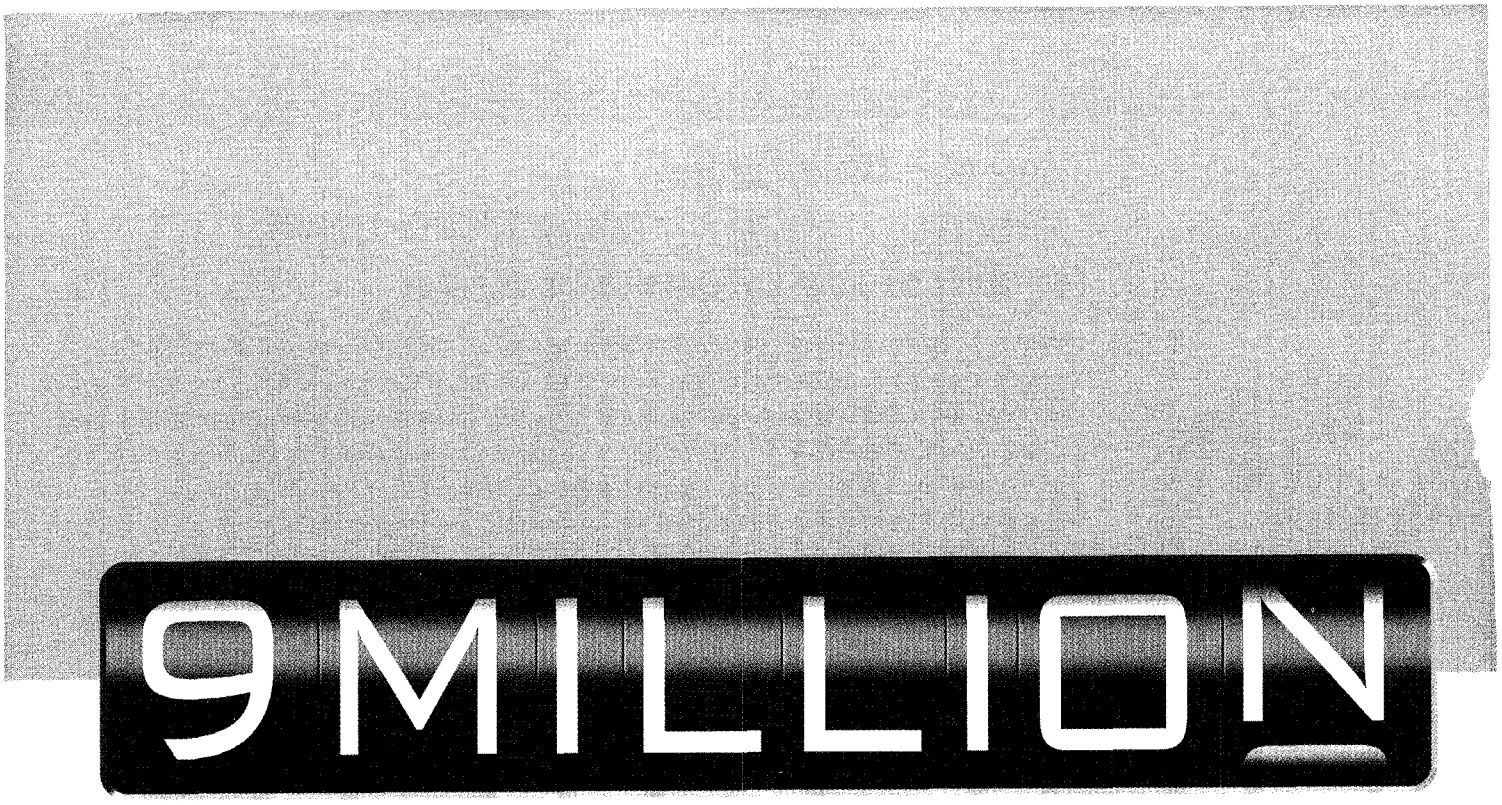
Paid for by the Hoover Institution, Stanford University.

HOOVER INSTITUTION

. . . ideas defining a free society

STANFORD UNIVERSITY, Stanford California 94305-6010 Toll-free: 877.466.8374 Fax: 650.723.1687 info@hoover.stanford.edu www.hoover.org

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED



ALTERNATIVE FUEL AUTOS

AND COUNTING

It's official. Nine million Americans drive Alternative Fuel Autos today and automakers are on track to sell a million alternative fuel autos this year. Hybrids, clean diesel and ethanol-capable autos are everywhere you go. Find out more at **DiscoverAlternatives.com.**

AUTO ALLIANCE

DRIVING INNOVATION℠

BMW GROUP DAIMLERCHRYSLER FORD MOTOR COMPANY GENERAL MOTORS
MAZDA MITSUBISHI MOTORS PORSCHE TOYOTA VOLKSWAGEN

LICENSED TO UNZ.ORG
ELECTRONIC REPRODUCTION PROHIBITED